The Girl Scouts Triumph

Girl Scout Series

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Claire was lying there on the rug, and Claire was crying.
Rosanna slid from her bed and ran across the room.

Girl Scouts Series, Volume 3

The Girl Scout's Triumph

OR

Rosanna's Sacrifice

BY

Katherine Keene Galt

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THE
GIRL SCOUTS SERIES

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THE GIRL SCOUT'S TRIUMPH

CHAPTER I

THE red-haired girl stared fixedly out of the window. There was nothing to look at but black night, and the light from within turned the glass into a dusky mirror where her image was clearly reflected. But she stared at it unseeingly, busy with her thoughts.

She was very early, but in fifteen minutes or so the Girl Scouts would commence to arrive. It was something of an ordeal to face the strangers and she had planned to be the first one in the room. She thought it a distinct advantage to meet them so rather than to enter the room feeling that the fifteen or twenty pairs of eyes were all noting her and the brains belonging to them were registering the usual formula, "Goodness, what *red* hair!"

She never could see why people always spoke of her hair. Certainly there were redder heads, and her heavy, waving locks were always perfectly cared for, glossy and brushed with careful attention. She pulled the long braid over her shoulder and looked at it. The braid was thicker than her wrist, and

when unbound it reached nearly to her knees. Almost petulantly she swung it behind her and turned her eyes toward the window again. They were queer eyes, a strange sea-green in color, and their black lashes and straight brows gave them a dark and brooding expression. She was pale, but it was not a wholesome pallor. She looked like a girl whose hours were not good, who sat up too late, and ate the wrong kinds of food. Her supple slender hands were bare except for a little finger ring of green jade set in silver. Her wrist-watch showed its tiny face from the center of a silver and jade bracelet. She wore the jewel pushed far up her sleeve.

The door opened, and a tiny figure in the uniform of the Scout Captain entered. The red-haired girl, still staring into the night, did not bother to turn, and with a long glance at the unfamiliar and unfriendly back the little lady who had just entered advanced to the table in the center of the room and arranged the papers lying there. Occasionally she directed a puzzled glance toward the girl at the window, but silence filled the big room and the resolute shoulders showed no sign of curiosity or embarrassment. The little lady at the table smiled. She was well aware that the girl at the window, looking into the dark pane as in a looking-glass, was watching her closely. She frowned suddenly at the girl's rudeness, then smiled and went on with her task.

A little later the door opened and a laughing, chattering group entered. Then and not until then did the red-haired girl rise and advance.

The girls stared, and the stranger's lip curled. Her red hair! It was always so. Walking slowly toward the table, she started to give a perfunctory salute, a salute which changed character and became snappy enough as she felt her gaze held by a pair of deep, compelling eyes. The Scout Captain was tiny and looked not a day over sixteen; but she was the Captain, and the red-haired stranger reluctantly admitted it to herself. She could not complain of the friendliness of her greeting. Wanderer as she was, drifting here and there over the world, a Scout in one place after another, she was aware that here were girls filled with the simplest and most charming courtesy. Each one met her with a sweet warmth of manner that almost pierced her chill and reserve, and when she turned and took her seat as the business meeting commenced, the girls were all along wondering if the stranger was shy, sad, or merely bored. A feeling of puzzled resentment stirred in a few. If the strange girl did not wish to be friendly, why had she brought herself and her jade green eyes and her queer ring into their happy circle?

The meeting progressed quietly. The strange new element cast a spell over the happy group. It was not as though they were depressed; it was rather as though they were waiting for something

to happen, as though it was time for the curtain to go up on a new and exciting play.

The girls, all a little restless by nature, smiled, shifted in their seats and occasionally touched each other with friendly, caressing hands. They regarded the little Captain with adoring eyes and cast questioning and friendly glances toward the newcomer.

She, however, ignored them all. It was as though she sat alone, her strange, deep eyes fixed on the Captain's sparkling face, studying it with cool, impersonal interest. She never changed her easy, graceful position, and her delicate hands rested in her lap motionless as though carved from wax.

The meeting closed, and as was their custom when a new girl joined, the Scouts gathered around the stranger with pretty, friendly advances. As they spoke to her, she regarded them with the same curious gaze she had bent on the Scout Captain.

"We are so glad you have joined us," said a sparkling mite, dancing from one tiny foot to the other. "You say your name is Claire Maslin? Mine is Estella LaRue."

"And mine is Jane Smith," said a tall beauty with golden hair and pansy-blue eyes.

"Plain Jane," laughed little Estella, swinging on Jane's arm.

"Have you just moved to Louisville?" asked another girl softly.

"Yes," said Claire. It was the first time she had spoken and the girls waited breathlessly for more information. But the simple yes was her whole contribution.

"Well, you must let us see a lot of you," said a bright-faced girl with docked hair. "Where do you live?"

"At the Seelbach at present," said Claire Maslin. Her voice was very deep and throaty for a young girl, and she spoke slowly.

Again the girls waited, expecting an invitation to call, but Claire said nothing. The silence grew oppressive. At the table the Scout Captain and a group of the girls were deep in some important discussion. No help could be expected from that quarter. It came, however, as the colored houseboy appeared at the door.

"Cunnel Maslin's car," he announced.

"Good-night," said Claire Maslin, her sudden smile sweeping the group and embracing them all. She left them and, moving easily toward the table, said a polite but brief good-night to the little Captain.

"We will see you out," said Estella LaRue, tugging at plain Jane and accompanying the newcomer to the door. She passively allowed them to come, and the door closed.

In five minutes the two girls, round eyed and astonished, rushed back.

"Oh, what *do* you think?" cried Jane.

"Yes, what?" echoed Estella, dancing up and down.

"*I* think she is a fairy princess in disguise," said Jane, nodding her golden head.

"*I* think she is a grouch," said a stout girl at the table, turning suddenly.

"Why, Mabel, you positively must not say a thing like that!" said the little Captain in a shocked tone. "She is shy, and it is a good deal to come and meet so many girls at one time."

"Do let us tell you what happened!" begged Estella. "We followed her out into the cloak-room, and she put on the *best* looking hat and Jane commenced to look for a cloak that might be hers. But I was watching her, and she put her hand inside her blouse, and brought out a little handful of stuff and shook it out, and oh dear, oh dear, you never, *never* saw anything so wonderful!"

"It was a big scarf of silk or chiffon or crepe. Something soft and cobwebby and heavy all at the same time. She wound it around her, and Estella stuttered, 'Won't you freeze in that?'"

"She said, 'My cloak is in the hall,' and we followed her down to the door, and there —"

"Standing against the wall," broke in Estella —

"Like a graven image," interrupted Jane —

"Was a *Chinaman!*" cried both girls.

"A *Chinaman!*" exclaimed the crowd as one girl.

"Yes," said Jane, while Estella danced up and down and nodded violently. "He had her cloak

over his arm, and she spoke to him in some jabbery language, Chinese I suppose, and he shook the cloak open and put it around her shoulders. It was soft white fur."

"Simply *too* lovely," sighed Estella.

"Then she said good-night, nothing else, and went out with the Chinaman following," completed Jane.

"Who can she be?" said Estella dreamily.

"A fairy princess, I reckon."

"Fairy fiddlesticks!" laughed the little Captain. "It is all very simple. Her father has been here to see me. He is a colonel in the Army and for a long time was stationed in China. Hence the Chinese servant. Her father, Colonel Maslin, is very anxious to have her know some nice girls. Claire joined the Girl Scouts when they were stationed in Washington. Colonel Maslin says Claire finds it difficult to make advances, and I want you all to be as friendly as you can be."

"Well, I would hate to have a heathen holding *my* cloak," said Mabel piously. "What did he have on?"

"Chinese clothes, of course, and made of silk, and all loose and baggy and flowing and embroidered, and sort of bluish and purplish and goldish."

"Must have been rather weird," said Mabel, sniffing.

"It wasn't weird one bit," declared Estella. "It was the most gorgeous thing I ever saw except that

white fur cloak. Oh, and did you notice that queer ring she wears? Just exactly the color of her eyes. I suppose that is Chinese too."

"She has had a most thrilling life, I am sure," said the little Captain. "I think she can tell us some interesting things when she feels acquainted with us. She is either very reserved or very shy. Don't rush her; just be your own dear friendly selves, my girls, and do all you can for her. Something tells me that Claire Maslin needs us."

"Someone always needs us, seems to me," said Mabel. "We just get one person off our minds when up pops someone else."

"Well, don't you think it is splendid and all sorts of fun to be of service?" demanded a bright, pretty, blond girl with docked hair.

"I suppose so," grumbled Mabel, "but I think sometimes it would be nice to think just about myself for a while."

The girls looked shocked, but the little Captain suddenly laughed. "Very well," she said. "It is worth trying if you think it would make you happy. I will detail you, Mabel, to make a study of this. For the coming week I want you to think wholly and *only* of yourself. You will keep a daily notebook and jot down exactly what you do for yourself and what you leave undone for others. Be sure to make note of the amount of happiness you get out of it. You will report at our weekly meeting next

Saturday. There is an extra meeting on Wednesday but you need not present any report then."

Mabel looked at Mrs. Horton with round, astonished eyes.

"Why, Captain, I can't *do* it," she said. "My mother wouldn't allow it at all. Why, she simply wouldn't! She is always preaching generosity and unselfishness."

"I don't believe she will notice what you are doing," said the Captain. "If she does, you can explain it to her. Otherwise say nothing at all. This is a Scout order, remember, and I expect you to do it with all your heart. We want to work this out. It will be very interesting to learn just how much pleasure one can get from absolute selfishness. That is what you really mean, you know, Mabel, when you want to live entirely for yourself."

"If everyone did it, no one would have to do anything for anyone else, would they? Everything would be all done, and everyone would be doing just what they liked best to do," said Mabel, sticking to her point.

"Perhaps," granted the Captain. "It is worth trying out."

"Why don't we all try it for a week?" suggested Mabel, feeling that perhaps there was safety in numbers.

"That would be upsetting," said the Captain. "You shall be our pioneer, Mabel."

"Well, mother won't stand for it, I know," said the girl as she pulled on her soft tam-o'-shanter and said good-night. She went out very thoughtfully and the Captain with a queer little smile hurried to the telephone booth and called a certain number. A long conversation with Mabel's mother followed: a conversation punctuated by much laughter and a little sadness.

When the Captain returned to the big scout room, all the girls had gone excepting the three she loved the best. Elsie Hargrave, the little French orphan adopted by Mrs. Hargrave and living in her splendid residence near by; Helen Culver, whose clever father had once been old Mrs. Horton's chauffeur; and the Captain's niece by marriage, Rosanna Horton: Rosanna of the dark eyes and lovely smile; Rosanna, whose tender and generous disposition made her well-loved wherever she went.

"What did you do that for, sweetness?" said Rosanna, putting an arm around the tiny Captain.

"You mean that detail for Mabel?" laughed little Mrs. Horton. "She needs it, and I am sure it will work out exactly right. Mabel is continually fretting about what she has to do for other people and what she is obliged to do at home. I think she is not nearly so selfish as she tries to be, but she is certainly taking a wrong turn. I want to help her if I can."

"She will be punished if she gets any worse than usual," said Helen with conviction. "Her mother

just simply *hates* selfishness and keeps after Mabel all the time."

"Perhaps that is where part of the trouble lies," said Mrs. Horton, nodding her head. "Well, I don't believe she will interfere this time."

"Trust the dear little one to arrange all," said Elsie in her pretty way.

"We will have a good many thrills, I think," said Helen, laughing, "between Mabel's experiment and that funny new girl, Claire Maslin."

Mrs. Horton looked grave.

"Confidentially, girls, I have a feeling that the 'funny new girl' as you call her, is not so funny after all. There is trouble enough there somewhere, and we must help her through."

CHAPTER II

When Mabel Brewster left the Horton residence, she found her brother Frank waiting for her. He was bursting with curiosity.

"Say, Mabe," he exclaimed, "who is the nifty red-head with the Chinese footman? Some style, I say. Who is she?"

"A new Girl Scout," said Mabel absently. Even the mysterious stranger was crowded out of her thoughts by the new orders she was about to follow.

"Well, don't you know her name, or where she lives, or anything about her?" demanded Frank.

"What ails you?" retorted Mabel testily. "I thought you had no use for girls."

"Don't usually," said the lad, "but this one is different. Comes sailing out with that Chink at her shoulder, and she was talking thirteen to the dozen in Chinese or something."

"Talking?" interrupted Mabel. "You don't mean she spoke, do you?"

"Not exactly," grinned Frank. "She simply rattled it off by the yard, and the Chinaman just went along nodding like one of those little china figures with wiggly heads you see in the Japanese shops."

"Did she take the Chinaman along in the car?" asked Mabel curiously.

"Yep! It was a big limousine, and the Chinaman hopped up in front with the driver. Miss Redhead sat alone like a queen. Say, she has wads of that red hair, hasn't she?"

"I didn't notice," said Mabel. "What have you been doing? Playing basketball?"

"Yes, we had a hot game, and I tore my suit all to pieces. I wish you would mend it, please, before Monday night. We are going to have practice games all next week."

"All right," said Mabel absently. Then as she remembered her task she said firmly, "I forgot; I can't mend your suit. Mend it yourself."

"Why, what ails you anyhow?" asked Frank wonderingly. "I can't sew, and I hate to ask mamma, she is always so busy. Why can't you mend it for me, Mabe?"

"Something else I want to do," said Mabel coolly.

"Well, I say you are a selfish pig!" retorted Frank.

"Don't you let mamma hear you talk to me like that!" said Mabel. "You know what you would get."

"It's what you are anyhow, and I will get even with you if you don't come across."

Frank flung this threat at his sister as they entered their modest home. Mabel, flushed and rather uncomfortable, went into the sitting-room

where her mother greeted her with a smile. She asked about the meeting, but made no comment when she heard Mabel telling Frank that she did not intend to go to church.

"What are you going to do?" he demanded. "Stay in bed and have your breakfast brought up and loaf all day?"

"I may," replied Mabel boldly.

"If you do, you are a pill!" said Frank hotly.

"Mamma, don't you let him talk to me like that," appealed Mabel.

"Fight your own battles, my dear," said Mrs. Brewster. "If you are not able to compel politeness from your brother and others I feel sure that it is your own fault, and there is no use in someone else demanding it for you. Besides," said Mrs. Brewster, yawning rather openly, "I am tired fussing over you children. I have about decided to go into business."

"Mummy!" cried Frank in a horrified tone.

"*Mam*-ma!" wailed Mabel.

"Exactly! I am thinking of going into interior decorating now that you children are old enough to look out for yourselves. I have spent a good share of my life looking after you, and now I think I will do something that I have always wanted to do."

There was a long silence. Coming on the heels of her own plan, Mabel listened in amazement. Frank, however, went to his mother and sat down

on the arm of her chair. There was a break in his boyish voice when he spoke.

"Mummy, I don't like it," he said. "Are we out of money, or anything like that?"

"Oh, no, not at all!" said Mrs. Brewster easily. "I just thought it would be fun."

"I don't like it," repeated Frank in a hurt tone and, kissing his mother, he left the room and went whistling upstairs. Mrs. Brewster chuckled.

"Frank always whistles when he is cross," she said, looking at her daughter as though she would appreciate the joke. But Mabel did not smile.

"I don't blame him at all," she said stiffly.

"Dear me! What a tempest in a tea-pot!" said Mrs. Brewster. "Here are a lot of stockings belonging to you that need mending. I am going upstairs to read," and she too left the room, calling back, "Be sure to put out the lights."

Mabel, quite stupefied with surprise, sat thinking awhile, then she snapped off the lights, thinking as she did so that it was her mother's usual custom to put the room in order before she left it for the night. But Mabel did not intend to do it. So she left the chairs standing every which way with papers and magazines scattered over the table and her mother's sewing trailing on the floor.

Reaching her own pretty room, she put on a comfortable kimono, arranged the light so she could read in bed, and from under a box divan dug out a paper-covered novel. She read the title with satis-

faction, *Lady Ermintrude's Lover,* or *The Phantom of Marston's Marsh.* She curled up against the pillows, laying a copy of *Longfellow's Complete Poems* close beside her as a quick, safe substitute in case of interruption. Then before opening her book, she gave herself up to her thoughts, planning a luxurious and detailed campaign of self-indulgence. She smiled as she thought of the little Captain. It was a good joke on her, because Mabel was shrewd enough to realize that Mrs. Horton was trying to show her that happiness, true happiness, lay in doing for others. Mabel, with the Captain's authority behind her, prepared to fulfill all her dreams. How this was going to strike her mother Mabel could not guess, but her mother was showing a strange, new and unforeseen side. She was glad, and hoped her mother would be so busy with her own plans that she would fail to notice her daughter's actions. Presently Mabel buried herself in the trashy novel and with many thrills over the foolish and impossible adventures of the Lady Ermintrude forgot everything but her book.

While she was thus employed, Mrs. Brewster, sitting on the foot of her son's bed, her feet curled under her, was deep in a whispered conversation which made both of them giggle like a pair of mischievous children rather than mother and son.

"All right, mummy," agreed Frank finally. "I am game, but I know Mabe will be awfully mad at me."

"Just go ahead and do as I tell you," said Mrs. Brewster, planting a kiss on her son's rumpled hair. "It will all come out right and I will help you when things get too deep."

She went off to bed, and Frank, grinning with pleased anticipation, was almost asleep before the door closed.

In the morning force of habit woke Mabel, and remembering the breakfast table to be set, she hopped out of bed and started for her morning bath. Then she quickly hopped again, this time back into bed.

Presently her mother looked in.

"Time to get up, Mabel dear," she said cheerily. "You will be late."

"I don't believe I want to get up this morning," answered Mabel uncertainly, and waited for her mother to retort, "Oh, yes, you do! Come and help with the breakfast!" but instead she said:

"All right, my dear; suit yourself," and went off to call Frank.

Somehow Mabel did not care to sleep after that, and lay listening to the sounds and smells from below. She did not guess that the lower doors had been purposely left open in order to let the odors from her favorite dishes ascend. But on the rare occasions when her mother had let her sleep over, there had always been a dainty meal left in the warming oven, so Mabel snuggled down and fixed

her already strained and tired eyes on the poor print in *Lady Ermintrude.*

Her mother and Frank went off to church without disturbing her, and as the front door closed with the click that told her that the latch was down, Mabel closed her book, hurried out of bed, and wrapping her kimono around her, went downstairs to explore.

She found nothing!

The warming oven was empty; the tables in the kitchen and dining-room were so empty that they looked lonesome. She looked in the ice-chest. There was nothing cooked. In the sink there was a pan of potatoes peeled and in cold water; on top of the warming oven a pan of bread pudding, looking very queer and doughy, was ready for baking. There were some chops. Nothing more.

Mabel commenced to feel abused. She went back to her room, and once more followed along on the trail of Lady Ermintrude. After a long while the telephone rang. Mabel went down and heard her mother's voice.

"We decided to have a little spree, dear," she said. "We are going to take dinner down town at Sherr's. Hop on the car and join us; we will wait for you."

"Where are you now?" asked Mabel joyfully. She loved an occasional meal at the bright pleasant restaurant where everything was always so deliciously cooked and carefully served.

"Here at Sherr's, and you must hurry; it is past one o'clock now."

"Why, I am not even dressed yet," wailed Mabel.

"Oh, I am sorry," said Mrs. Brewster. "I don't believe we had better wait. You know it always takes you an hour to dress. Better luck next time, dearie! There are chops in the ice-box, and the potatoes and pudding are ready to cook, and there are some canned peas. You can fix a good dinner, and we will be home before long. Perhaps if you have time you had better pick up the sitting-room. I didn't feel in the mood for it this morning. It is an awful mess. Don't bother if you don't want to, however. Good-bye!"

Mabel hung up the receiver with an angry frown. Nothing was going right; nothing was starting as she had intended it. She dressed slowly, and ate bread and butter and sugar for dinner. The milkman had forgotten to leave the milk. She drank water. And she did *not* pick up the sitting-room.

Later, her mother and brother failing to appear, she went out for a walk. When she returned at half past five, she met her truant family descending from a big touring car. Some friends had picked them up and had taken them for a long ride.

Mrs. Brewster noted the bread crumbs on the kitchen table and the open sugar bowl. She smiled. Later they all sat down to a delicious hot supper, and Mabel cheered up enough to listen politely at

least to the accounts of their dinner and ride that had followed.

But when according to her orders, Mabel went to writing the account of the day in her notebook, it did not sound interesting at all!

The next afternoon when Mabel came from school, having been detained half an hour on account of inattention, she found Frank busy mending the tears in his basketball suit by the simple method of drawing them up in a tight pucker.

"Where is mother?" demanded Mabel.

"Dunno," said Frank, squinting at his work.

"Well, I wonder where she is," said Mabel. "Rosanna Horton asked me to come over to supper tonight, and I want to wear that new dress mother is making for me. She said she would have it done today." She went into her mother's little sewing-room, and came back looking disappointed.

"It isn't finished at all!" she said. "I don't see where mother can be!"

"Fix it yourself," suggested Frank, stabbing his needle into the jersey.

"I can't," said Mabel. "Mother always does it. Besides," she added as an afterthought, "I hate sewing."

As she spoke, her mother came in with a cheery greeting for her children. Before Mabel had a chance to ask her mother about the dress, Mrs. Brewster said,

"Mabel, I want you to get supper for Frank to-

night, and be here when the laundress comes for her pay. I have been asked to take dinner with a woman from New York City who is an interior decorator of note."

"I can't, mamma, Rosanna Horton has asked me over there, and I told her I would come," said Mabel peevishly.

"Well, tell her you won't be among those present," said Frank, chewing off his thread.

"But I told her I would come, and I am going," said Mabel, stubbornly.

"I bet you won't if mamma says not," retorted Frank.

His mother caught his eye and shook her head.

"Someone will have to stay home and see the laundress, and Frank has his basketball practice. It is a great chance for me, so I wish you would stay, Mabel," she said.

"I don't see how I can!" objected Mabel. "I told Rosanna I would come and I reckon I had better go. You can go some other time, can't you, mamma?"

"I suppose I can," said Mrs. Brewster, and left the room.

Mabel glanced at her brother and noting his scowl, commenced to read a magazine.

She was perfectly miserable. When it came time to dress, she donned her old frock, wondering why her mother had laid the new one, still unfinished, across her bed. Mabel loved to go to the Hortons.

But for once the dinner was not a success. All the conversation seemed to hinge on anecdotes of unselfishness and generosity. Mabel thought of Frank working on his gym suit because she wouldn't mend it for him, but she thought most of her mother giving up her dinner to sit at home and wait for the laundress. Her mother was too kind to make the poor colored woman come again for her money. Mrs. Brewster knew that she needed it.

Mabel, sitting with unwonted primness and silence at the Horton table, thought harder and harder and could not enjoy herself. And Mrs. Horton, the little Scout Captain, saw and smiled to herself a sly, quiet smile that scarcely disturbed her dimples. She wondered curiously what sort of a report Mabel would bring her.

CHAPTER III

We will leave Mabel embarked on her desperate career of utter selfishness and return to Claire Maslin.

When Rosanna and Helen and pretty Elise went to call on her they found her rooms had been marvelously changed from the stiff appearance of hotel suites by the gorgeous draperies and scarfs and table covers placed wherever they could possibly be put. A faint, sweet, oriental odor seemed to come from them, and the soft-stepping Chinaman who ushered them in seemed to be part of a dream. Claire looked modern enough, however, in her kilted skirt of big green plaid, soft silk shirtwaist and dull green sweater. Her face was as impassive as ever, but she seemed to think that as hostess something more than silence was required of her, and she talked in a very friendly and entertaining manner.

Elise, always thoughtful of little courtesies, asked almost at once if they might meet Madame, her mother, and the girls were filled with pity when Claire replied that her mother was an invalid and was away at a sanitarium. It was clear that Claire in her silent, repressed way felt her mother's illness very deeply. She changed the subject at once.

Little by little, however, the girls gleaned the bare facts of her life. She had been born in the Philippines, and had traveled from post to post and from country to country with her parents until the time of her mother's illness. There was a gap in her story there, but later she went with her father, the Colonel. Her own maid, who took charge of the house when they had one, was a serious looking New England woman about sixty years old. The Chinaman too went with them everywhere.

"We expect to move tomorrow," said Claire. "Papa has found a nice house way up on Third Street. It is furnished, so we will not have to unpack our things."

"You look unpacked now," said Helen, glancing at the gorgeous silks and cushions that were scattered around.

"Oh, no, we just take a trunk full of these with us so wherever we stop the rooms will seem like home to us. Papa and I both hate hotel rooms. They all look alike with their stuffy furniture and dreadful curtains. It does not take Chang long to fix everything and we are much more comfortable. I think we will like the new house." Then she added rather shyly, "I hope you will all come to see me very, very often. Papa wants me to know all of you. I don't like girls very well."

The three girls stared in amazement. She didn't like *girls!* And she was willing to tell them so! Elise lifted her eyebrows. It was so rude.

Helen Culver laughed. "Why do you bother with us if you do not like us?" she demanded.

Claire was blushing. "I should not have said that," she confessed bluntly. "I don't mean to say what I think. You must excuse me for saying it."

"And we will forgive you for having such a heart for us," said Elise, smiling. "I know how you will feel soon. At least for these two dear ones. You will love them so much."

"It is such a beautiful day," said Rosanna, to change the conversation, "why can't we all take a ride? Perhaps you would like to see our parks."

"I have seen everything," said Claire wearily. "I have done nothing but ride ever since we came to Louisville. But every afternoon I drive up to Camp Taylor to get papa and it is now almost time to go. Won't you all come with me? I do truly want you to, and papa wants so much to meet you. Papa likes girls," she added with a smile.

"I think we should love to go," said Rosanna heartily. She wanted to accept the first invitation that Claire gave, so she spoke quickly and nodded gaily to the girls. But it was a nod that they understood to mean "We will go." They were accustomed to the guiding nods of the wise little Rosanna.

Gliding smoothly along the beautiful roads in the luxurious limousine, the four girls chatted gaily. And returning, the talk and laughter was even more

spirited for they found Colonel Maslin to be all that one could dream of or hope for in the way of a jolly, handsome father. Nothing would do but they must return to the hotel for afternoon tea, and Colonel Maslin's idea of tea was ordering all the goodies to be found on the menu card, and then a few more that the head waiter managed to think up. So it was a regular feast.

Then the Colonel and Claire insisted on driving them home, and Colonel Maslin went in and was introduced to each of their families. The girls only waited for the big Maslin car to be well on its way when with one accord they hurried over to Rosanna's.

"Well, what do you think?" demanded Helen.

"Claire's father, is he not most splendid?" asked Elise with a deep sigh of appreciation.

"Yes, he is!" agreed Rosanna. "But Claire is the oddest girl that I ever saw. Did you notice how she sits and looks in one direction as though she did not hear a word you were saying? And her eyes look perfectly desperate!"

"She doesn't hear much that you say, at that," said Helen. "I watched her. She has taken a great fancy to you, Rosanna."

"Dear me!" said Rosanna. "I almost wish she wouldn't! Whenever I look at her or think about her, it seems as though a cloud pressed down on me and choked me."

"Don't you like her?" asked Helen.

"Yes, in a way I do, but there is something so strange about her, and I can't help the feeling that some way she is going to have an influence on my life."

"Don't let her," said Helen calmly. "Do some influencing yourself. I never let anyone influence me that way. Why, you will be awfully uncomfortable if you feel as though that girl with her red hair and green eyes could turn you from your purpose in any way. Don't you let her! I am surprised at you, Rosanna!"

"I don't mean it in that way," said Rosanna. "She will not change me, Helen dear, but in some way or other — Oh, I can't tell what *I do* mean!"

"Too many tarts!" laughed Helen. "I confess she is a queer girl, but we don't have to see much of her, and I doubt if we will. We have enough work coming along this spring without taking on any more than we have to. I want to earn all the merits and emblems that I possibly can by summer time, and I shall be a busy girl if I do it. And you want to do a lot of Scout work, Elise, now that you have learned to speak English so nicely."

"*Merci* — I mean, thank you," said Elise. "Indeed I do much want to do something to benefit myself, and more to please our dear Captain. And somehow I think you are both seeing that strange Claire wrongly. I think the cloud hangs over her, and she is most, most sad, most gloomy in its shadow."

"Dear me, how mysterious!" said Helen. "To me, she seems just like any other girl, except that she has gorgeous clothes and those queer green eyes, and such wads and wads of hair, and that Chinaman, and all those splendid embroideries. And of course it is odd the way she sits and never moves her hands but looks over your head as though there was some writing on the wall."

"Perhaps there is," said Rosanna. "Like that man in the Bible, you know, who had a warning."

Rosanna, as she spoke, little dreamed that there *was* writing on every wall, in every cloud, that poor Claire saw and read with a feeling of hopeless horror.

Leaning close to his handsome daughter in the big luxurious limousine, Colonel Maslin was saying to her, "Well, Bird o' Paradise, how do you like your new friends? Are they as friendly and fascinating as Kentucky girls are supposed to be?"

"You met them," said Claire evenly. "What do you think?"

"A mere man isn't supposed to think," laughed Colonel Maslin. "They seem delightful to me, so pretty and dainty and girlish. Stray sunbeams."

Claire laughed. "I should say you thought quite fully on the subject, daddy!"

"Well, they are all that I say, are they not?" asked the Colonel.

"Oh, yes!" and Claire leaned indifferently away from her father's shoulder. He glanced at her and

sighed. They entered the hotel in silence, each one busy with somber thoughts, and as the Chinaman closed the door behind them Claire suddenly flung her gloves on the table with a gesture of impatience and turning to the Colonel said passionately:

"Father, look at me! Am I like those other girls? Do I look like them or act like them or talk like them? Is my heart like theirs? Oh, father, do you suppose they ever have the fits of awful temper that I have, or do the wild things I like to do? Just look at me, father! I am thirteen years old, and I feel thirty. Why do you make me have anything to do with them — those girls, I mean? We won't be friends, ever. It will be just like it has always been on other Posts where you have been stationed. You always want me to make friends with girls. And I hate them! And sooner or later they find it out and they are shocked. I wish I could shock them worse than I do! I'd like to scream and dance and pull my hair at them!"

"Steady, Claire, steady!" said Colonel Maslin in a quiet level voice.

He tried to take his daughter's hands but she jerked away.

"Don't!" she exclaimed harshly. "Oh, father, can't you *see* how it is? Can't you *see* that they never, never like me? They look at my red hair, and they stare at Chang, and snub Nancy because they think that is the way to treat my maid, and

they like the candy you always bring me, but we are never *friends*. Oh, I hate them all: every one of them! Sunbeams you call them. Well, I feel like a streak of lightning, and I would like to *strike* them!"

She beat her slender hands together violently, and crossing the room flung herself down on a divan and covered her eyes. Her father, white faced and stern, followed her and seated himself on the edge of the divan, although Claire lay rigid and tried to crowd him off.

Colonel Maslin was silent for a time, and when he spoke his voice was very sad.

"This is my fault, my child," he said. "When your mother was taken ill and could not be with us, I could not face the loneliness of having you away from me. Both your aunts insisted that I was wrong, but I wanted you for comfort, my darling, so I took you with me. Later, when I should have sent you to a good boarding-school, I did not have the courage. You are old for your age, I confess it, yet in many ways you are a spoiled and undisciplined child, my dear. You make it very hard for me, for I need you and you fail me. Now I am going to ask one more favor of you. After that, after you have honestly tried to do what I ask you, we will consider the subject closed for all time and you will go away to school."

"You know I hate that worst of all!" cried Claire, lifting a stained and tearful face.

"*Nothing* but girls at school! Oh, father, why can't you let me do what I want to do, just amuse myself my own way, when I am not studying? You know I work hard at my books and music, and I don't *want* any friends. Girls are so curious, they always want to know things, and I am so afraid they will find out —"

"Our misfortune is not a disgrace, Claire," said her father in a voice that shook in spite of his efforts to keep it steady. "And I want you to have friends."

"Claller for Mlissie Claire," said Chang, coming silently from the telephone.

"Another of them!" groaned Claire, sitting up. "Tell her I must be excused."

"No," said Colonel Maslin sternly. "You promised to do what I asked, and I want to see you begin now — today. If after three months of honest effort you still take no pleasure in the society of these girls, I will give up the struggle and arrange your life in some different way. Come, Claire, do, *do* try! You have given me your promise. A Maslin never breaks his word and I hold you to yours."

Claire looked up wearily. "Very well, father, I will really try. Who is it, Chang?"

"Mlieeis Blooster," said Chang in his pleasant sing-song voice.

"Oh, yes, I know that girl," said Claire. "She is a queer one. Ask her to come up, Chang."

Mabel, rather flustered over her adventure into the unknown mysteries of the big hotel, entered sedately and seated herself in the deepest and most comfortable chair that she could choose. For once Claire had to lead the conversation, as Mabel spoke but little and seemed to expect her hostess to do the talking. Colonel Maslin, thinking that his presence might keep the girls from getting on an easier footing, excused himself, and in a few minutes sent up from the office a huge box of candy.

Mabel did brighten at this and stayed long after the proper length of a first call, while she ate candy and told her troubles, both real and imaginary, to her bored hostess. She finally told her of the task the Captain had set for her. And at last Claire was interested. She listened intently as Mabel droned on about her experiences.

"I don't think parents really understand their children," said Mabel, carefully choosing a large chocolate cream. "Of course it may be different with you, but my mother certainly does not understand me at all. I am naturally very sensitive and love to read and dream, and I never get well into a book without her reminding me of something horrid and domestic that has to be done. I know I could write beautifully if I had time to collect my thoughts. And now that Captain Horton expects me to lead my own life regardless of others for a whole week, though of course part of the time has gone, I thought I could write some truly beauti-

ful things. But nothing goes right. Of course mother does not know that Captain Horton told me to try this and she never notices any change in me, but she acts too queer for anything. She goes out all the time, and doesn't do any sewing for us (I have a brother) and last night she was talking about a *career!* My brother ought to stop her, but he just backs her right up."

"It is too bad," sympathized Claire, passing the candy. "My father doesn't understand —"

"I think a parent's place is in the home," Mabel interrupted. She was not at all interested in Claire or her father. Like all selfish people, she talked for the pleasure of hearing herself. "But mother has changed. I suspect it is old age. She will be thirty-five her next birthday. I have three more days for my experiment, and then if I cannot live my own life at home I shall ask mother to arrange something different. I have always wanted to be a bachelor girl. I read a story about one. She wrote for the papers and made enormous sums and had a *sweet* apartment, and was so happy because she felt her soul was free. My, I must go! It is nearly supper time, and I think mother is going to have Parker House rolls. I adore them. I had no idea I had stayed so long, but you are so entertaining and it is so nice to think we feel alike about leading our own lives our own way, and all that."

Claire murmured a faint good-bye after her de-

parting guest and flopped heavily down on the divan where she had so recently thrown herself in tears.

She lay staring at the ceiling, deep in thought. A hazy question flitted through her mind. "Am I like that?" she asked herself. Then she laughed and dismissed the silly idea.

"What a dreadful girl!" she concluded. "Too dreadful! And father wants me to bother with people like that!"

CHAPTER IV

Having met Colonel Maslin in the hotel lobby, Mabel found herself riding home in the beautiful Maslin limousine. She sat exactly in the center of the softly cushioned seat and stared haughtily at the passersby. She inclined her head a trifle in condescending acknowledgment of the traffic police who waved them on as they turned from Broadway into Third Street. Mabel was sorry that he did not seem to notice her. He lived three doors from Mabel on the side street and it seemed a pity not to impress him, especially as he was forever bringing home the Brewster dog when he ran away without his tag.

But luck was with Mabel when the big car rolled noiselessly up to the curb before her home, for her mother was standing at the window, and her brother and three other boys were having a last confab before separating for the night. Mabel crossed the sidewalk and went up the steps in her most stately manner. She did not notice the boys at all.

"Well," said her mother as she entered the house, "did you get a ride home? How do you like the Maslin girl?"

"She is a rare soul," said Mabel. Then descend-

ing to earth, "I wish you could see the rooms they live in. You never *did* see such lovely things. And she has a maid, and a Chinese house-servant, and her father is a perfect dear and sent us up a big box of candy."

"A rare soul, is she?" said Mrs. Brewster. "How do you mean?"

"Oh, I can't explain," said Mabel. "She is so understanding, and we seemed to think and feel just alike on so many subjects. I expect to see a great deal of her. We have so much in common."

"Does she object to dusting and making beds and things of that sort?" asked Mrs. Brewster in a mild tone.

"I don't know," said Mabel, flushing.

"Ummm," said Mrs. Brewster. To Mabel the smile was maddening,— infuriating.

"I don't see why you take it like that," she burst out harshly. "Just because I have a mind above the average and want to live my own life and set my soul free! I am reading every little while about some girl who does it. But I never get a chance. Nothing for *me* but school and practice and that old dusting and helping around the house!"

Mrs. Brewster sat down and looked quizzically at her excited elder child. She was in no hurry to break the silence, while Mabel stared out of the window and drummed on the pane with nervous finger tips. Finally she said gently, "Just what do you think you would like to do?"

"Oh, I want to break away, and have a chance to expand! I feel choked the way things go now. I read about one girl about my age who left home and took an apartment and lived her own life. It was wonderful. She went to work too, and made lots and lots of money."

"Lucky girl," said Mrs. Brewster. "What a help she must have been to her family! Oh, I forgot; the trick was that she *didn't* help her family at all, did she? Was she a rare soul too?"

Mabel registered what she fondly hoped was a look of scorn. She did not speak, and after a moment Mrs. Brewster continued:

"What was her chosen field of endeavor? In other words, what job did she get?"

"She became a newspaper woman," said Mabel.

"But what did she do in the meantime? What did she do while she was learning to do newspaper work? Didn't you say she was a girl about your age?"

Mabel answered patiently.

"She became a newspaper writer at once," she said. "Don't you see, mamma, that is just the point? She went away from all the worries of her own home, where she never had time to think things out for herself, and it gave her a chance to *expand.* While she was at home her time was so broken."

"I see," said Mrs. Brewster. "I suppose her cruel parents expected her to dust and wash dishes and mend her clothes and practice, and all that.

It was a great pity. I suppose there are a great many parents like that — so thoughtless."

"Indeed there are!" said Mabel with feeling. For the moment, hearing her mother agree with her, she forgot to whom she was talking. "If mothers and fathers only could understand that girls want to be *free*, that they want to expand and be themselves, everything would be different."

"I don't doubt it at all," said Mrs. Brewster. She left the room and Mabel continued the train of pleasant thought. She made no move to help about supper, and Mrs. Brewster did not call her. Remembering that the girl she had read about was accustomed to sit at her piano and compose most beautiful melodies whenever she was disturbed or wanted to soothe herself, Mabel went to the piano and, putting a firm foot on the forbidden loud pedal, broke into what she fondly told herself were crashing chords palpitating with the suppressed passion of her breaking heart. The sounds thrilled her, and she continued until interrupted by a roar from Frank who was doing his algebra at the kitchen table.

"Aw, Mabe, have a heart and quit that noise, will you?" he begged.

His rudeness broke the spell. Mabel rose and started to sweep haughtily toward the stairs. She would retire to the sanctuary of her own room and brood! But before she reached the door she heard her mother call, "Supper is ready!"

Mabel did not hesitate. She remembered the Parker House rolls and hurried into the dining-room. The rolls were there, and it was well worth postponing a "brood" for them. Mrs. Brewster was unusually silent and Frank watched her anxiously until, catching her eye, she nodded and flashed a quick look toward her abstracted daughter. At the close of the meal Mabel said with what sounded to Frank perilously like kindly meant condescension, "That was a delicious little supper, mamma," and receiving a meek but fervent, "Thank you so much, dear," from her mother Mabel went straightway to her own room and closed the door between herself and her unappreciative family.

The sound of that door was a signal for Frank to explode.

But Mrs. Brewster laid a soft hand over his rebellious mouth.

"Softly, softly, dear!" she begged. "I want you to be as patient as you can. If *you* were on the wrong path somehow or other, you would be glad to be turned back where there was safer going, wouldn't you? Well, Mabel must work this thing out for her own good. You and I cannot tell how she will come out of it, because after all her soul *is* her own, and she knows it better than we do. But we have faith in her, sonny dear, don't forget that, and we believe she is a dear daughter and sister, who really loves us with all her heart."

"Yah, she acts it!" scoffed Frank, the unbeliever.

"Give her time, dear," said Mrs. Brewster. "Please be patient. I am going to do some telephoning now, and if you hurry with your algebra and finish that history lesson, we will go to the movies. There is a good play at the Strand tonight."

"I can do that all right," said Frank, and after his mother had gone to the telephone he rushed the dishes out into the kitchen, stacked them neatly, and was buried in his book when his mother returned, a look of amusement rather mixed with worry on her pleasant, wholesome face.

The result of the telephone talk was an astounding offer from Mrs. Brewster to meet Mabel when that young lady left school next day. Mrs. Brewster was waiting for her daughter at the door of the High School, and as they started slowly down the street, Mrs. Brewster said, "You know the girl you were telling me about last night? I mean the one who broke away and lived by herself and freed her soul and all that?"

Mabel nodded. Was her mother going to lecture her?

"I don't want to stand in your light, Mabel, and some day suffer all kinds of remorse when I remember that I was the one who held you back just because I am old-fashioned and happen to think that home is the place for a young girl to grow up in, a place where she can have her mother's care and

guidance and all that. No, I just can't do it! I want to give you a good start if you still feel that you want to take it. Something came up today that looked exactly like what you wanted, and I snatched at the chance. At least until you decide. Of course I could not decide for you."

"What is it?" asked Mabel cautiously.

"It seems quite wonderful," said Mrs. Brewster. "You know that ducky little apartment the Kents have right under Grandmother Brewster's? They are going away for the next six months, and want someone to live there and take care of it."

"And we are going to live there?" cried Mabel delightedly. "Oh, I am so glad! I am so sick of our house, it is so out of date, mamma, and on such a side street! What will you do — shut it up or rent it?"

"Don't go so fast, Mabel. You say yourself you can't expand your soul when Frank and I are around. I should think not! We will live just where we are, and if you like *you* can have the flat all to yourself. I was there this morning. There is the sweetest kitchenette, with everything in it, and the dearest living-room and dining-room combined and, Mabel, *wait* until you see the bed-room! It will be a lot to keep clean. I certainly was lucky this morning. Just as I was coming home I met Marian Gere, who does society for the *Times-Leader,* and she is looking for an assistant, and simply snapped at the chance of having your help.

I said you could help her after school hours until the end of this term, and after that you could give all your time, because I did not feel that I could ask any girl to stay in school who was as talented as you feel you are. And she said I was very sensible to let you try your wings. *Try your wings.* Don't you think that a sweet expression? I remembered it because I thought perhaps you could use it in your writing some time." Mrs. Brewster paused for breath.

Mabel was looking rather wild-eyed. Things seemed to be happening rather rapidly. Was it possible that all her cherished dreams were to be realized, and at once?

Her mother had the key to the little playhouse apartment, the owner having departed, and Mabel looked it over and over with actual cold chills of delight coursing down her spine.

"I wouldn't tell Grandmother Brewster for a while about being here," suggested Mrs. Brewster. "She might think you needed looking after," and Mabel agreed.

"When will you come over?"

"Oh, today!" cried Mabel. "And I think I will go down right now and see Miss Gere."

"Very well, and I will go home and pack a few things for you. I think I would just take a handbag now, and later you will know exactly what you will need. There is not much closet space in the apartment. And of course Frank and I will hope

to see you occasionally. But we will understand if you don't come home often, because you will be working pretty hard to earn your living, even with such a good start. It is lucky that you can get this lovely place to live in rent free. Later I suppose you will not care what you have to pay, but now it will be a help. And you will find that groceries are pretty high."

Mrs. Brewster nodded a gay good-bye as the car approached, and left Mabel walking down Third Street on her way to the *Times-Leader*. A few blocks on her way she overtook Jane and Estella arm in arm as usual. Mabel gave her braid a flirt and unconsciously puffed out her chest.

"Where away, Mabel?" chirruped little Estella, twinkling. In a rush of words Mabel told her tale while the girls listened in speechless amazement.

"You don't mean to say that you have really *left home?*" demanded Estella. There was no chirp in her voice now, no twinkle in her face. She looked absolutely shocked.

"I leave tonight," said Mabel, "soon as I settle my salary with Miss Gere. I am *wild* to be free! It is going to be wonderful, perfectly wonderful! I expect to write something grand. Just think, no one to disturb me; no housework, no practicing! Oh, how my mind will soar!"

"Are you going to keep a maid?" asked Jane feebly. "You said no housework."

"Well, it won't be like the housework at home,"

declared Mabel. "That is the dustiest old place! It won't take me a minute to put everything in order at my apartment."

"But your mother!" almost wailed Estella. "How can you leave your mother? I can't bear to leave mine for all day even."

"Mothers are different," said Mabel sadly. "Mamma is sweet, of course, but she does not understand me. We are better apart; I feel it."

"Well, of all things!" said Jane slowly. "I am glad *my* soul doesn't have to have things done for it. I don't remember much of the time that I have one, and you couldn't *hire* me to leave home."

"You don't understand," said Mabel loftily. "One must do what seems right to one's own self. I am doing that, and I shall be rewarded. Come and see me sometimes, girls. I shall be very busy, but never too busy to receive my old Girl Scout friends."

She nodded, and struck into a quicker pace which carried her ahead of the two girls.

"Well, I think that is perfectly awful, don't you, Jane?" demanded little Estella, looking at the broad, retreating back.

"Simply dreadful!" murmured Jane, shocked and wondering.

"What do you suppose has got into Mabel? Do you suppose it is possible that her mother is actually letting her do it, or is she running away or something awful?"

"Oh, Jane, do you remember what the Captain told her to do at the last meeting? Oh, oh, what *will* the Captain say when she hears about this? She will feel awfully. Why, she never, never meant Mabel to actually leave her mother and go off and do dreadful things! I don't see how Mabel can bear it! And it will make our little Captain feel awfully!"

"Says she is going to live all alone, and work on the newspaper. Just like being an orphan. Get her own meals and everything. I couldn't stand it," said Jane.

They stared after the distant figure. They did not approve.

"But, of course," said Estella suddenly, "we must not be too hard on Mabel. You know she writes real poetry. Perhaps that is what ails her. We mustn't forget that."

"No," said Jane pityingly, "we mustn't forget *that.*"

CHAPTER V

MABEL, hunting for Miss Gere in the big newspaper building, nearly died of fright. Some repairs were being made, and the office force was huddled into a space about half large enough for it up on the fourth floor. When Mabel finally reached the room, she was told that Miss Gere was out but that she might wait at her desk. The desk was a small, disorderly table littered with papers swarming over, around and under a battered typewriter. She sat down and looked about. Young men, unattractive, harried looking young men with steely eyes hurried in, dropped down before tables just like Miss Gere's, pounded furiously on typewriters, or consulted earnestly with a tall, thin man in shirt sleeves, who glared ferociously at their papers from the safe shadow of his green eye-shade. To Mabel, watching with all her might, this tall thin man seemed to be the only one who was not in a hurry. He listened to everyone, sometimes to three or four at a time, answered questions, sent instructions down a telephone that Mabel rightly guessed connected with the printing rooms far below and seemed perfectly capable, as indeed he was, of keeping a thousand different lines of action going at once. Mabel wondered who he was.

He was the City Editor, and already he knew about Mabel and had judged her with one of the lightning glances hidden under the shade. The room was overheated, and Mabel, waiting as patiently as she could, commenced to grow drowsy. In a half dream, she saw herself entering the magic railing which surrounded the tall man's desk. *She* did not lean hectically over the rail and talk rapidly from the outside as did the young men reporters. No, Mabel, grown tall and slender and surpassingly beautiful, walked *into* the charmed circle, greeting her chief with a slow, faint smile. Then opening her hand-bag, and drawing off her gloves while she lazily watched the great man through her long drooping lashes, she proceeded to present a sheaf of papers written over closely in her fine neat hand. The lines of her beautiful rajah silk sport suit clung to her lovely figure as she modestly drew the chief's attention to some particular statement. Stubby Mabel, in her plain, serviceable school dress, sitting unnoticed at Miss Gere's table, was thrilled at the sight of herself! As the dream-Mabel finished her interview with the City Editor and rose, she said in response to his enthusiastic praise of her work, "Thanks so much!"

The real Mabel was frozen with horror to hear herself actually speak the words! For a moment she assured herself that she had imagined that too, but a wild-looking, oldish man banging furiously on the typewriter on the next table turned and

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stared at her and said, "Huh?" in an absent-minded way.

"Nothing, sir," said Mabel in a flustered voice, not at all the voice of the dream-Mabel who had wholly disappeared. The real Mabel sat very still and red until Miss Gere came in.

Miss Gere was not at all what Mabel thought a Society Editor should be. The lady slouched in, a fedora hat pulled low over her eyes giving her very much the general appearance of the City Editor. A long, full ulster hung uncertainly from her thin shoulders, and its deep pockets bulged with scrap paper. Her beautiful, delicate hands were quite grubby on the knuckles. When she entered, she smiled a brilliant, transforming smile that seemed to embrace everyone in the room. All the hurried young men felt it and beamed in return; the City Editor turned his green eye shade in her direction, and the frantic typist beside Mabel stopped long enough to flap a thin paw in her direction.

She threaded her way slowly across the room, shaking her head as Mabel rose and offered her the chair she was occupying, and sat down in another. She pushed back her hat.

"You are prompt," she said. "I didn't expect you would come today, though your mother said you would. She says you are very anxious for a newspaper career. Well, you must be willing to do a good deal of hard work." She turned first

one and then the other grubby hand over and studied her perfectly kept nails. Mabel, fascinated, watched her every movement.

"I told your mother it was dollars to doughnuts that you wouldn't stick it out a month, but she seems to think you will. Of course if you have actually gone to the length of leaving home and all that, why, you *must* be in earnest. Do you know anything at all about reporting?"

"A little," said Mabel. "I have reported for the *High School Clarion.*"

A smile flitted across Miss Gere's thin, eager face. She did not seem as deeply impressed as she might have been. Mabel hastened on.

"I write a good deal by myself," she said. "I can bring you some poems and sketches that I have done."

"It won't be necessary," said Miss Gere hastily, "although I am sure they are well worth reading. I will start you on something easy. You are to be my assistant, you know. All these men around here are reporters too, and that big man is our City Editor. Bring what you write to me because he doesn't want to know that you are on earth. I have a full day tomorrow and you may cover the business meeting at the Red Cross Rooms, and then you may call up the women on this list, and ask them to give you some details about the entertainments they are giving. Bring in a nice little story about all this, and I will give you further

directions when I see you. You may call some of these ladies up tonight. Use all sorts of tact."

She passed a slip of paper to Mabel bearing a typewritten list of well-known names. Mabel took it, and guessing from Miss Gere's preoccupied manner that the interview was at an end reluctantly passed out.

Reaching the street, she dropped the humble air that she had worn in the office and, feeling like a conqueror, turned toward her new home. Her thoughts were all of Miss Gere. How gloriously, fascinatingly thin she was! Mabel unfastened her coat. Perhaps she would look thinner if her coat flopped.

Then she heard her name called.

A big car was crawling along the curb, and from the limousine Claire Maslin and Rosanna Horton called her name again. The car stopped and in response to a word from his young mistress the Chinaman stepped down and opened the door.

"Let us take you home," said Claire in her deep, drawling voice. Mabel entered and seated herself, smiling.

"I have just been down making arrangements to begin my newspaper career," she said. "I think every young writer should spend a certain time on newspaper work. It is such good practice, and one learns so much about Life."

"Dear me!" said Rosanna. "What do you

mean, Mabel? Is your mother going to let you do newspaper reporting?"

"She is perfectly willing for me to do whatever I feel I ought to do," said Mabel loftily. "Mother and I have had a good talk, and I find she is a great deal broader than I feared she would be. The fact is I have left home and have started on a career. I have a charming little box of a place where you must look me up."

"Splendid!" said Claire, clapping her gloved hands lightly. "I shall tell my father, and see what he says. I am always begging him to let me go away and live my life as I want to live it."

"But, Mabel!" gasped Rosanna in horror. "You can't do anything like that. You are only a little girl! You *can't* go off and live by yourself. Why, you just can't! And, besides, you know the loyalty and service a Girl Scout owes to her mother. I don't see how you can *think* of such a thing. I am sure you must be joking."

Mabel's face flushed deeply. "You don't understand at all, Rosanna," she said stiffly. "What might be right for one is not right for another. You know the Captain herself told me to live for myself alone and see how it would work out, and it is working out wonderfully. I shall report Saturday night at the meeting that it is a great success."

"Oh, dear, *dear!*" cried Rosanna. "I know she

did not mean to have anything like this happen. Oh, Mabel, you *must* go back home!"

"I think she is right," said Claire.

"Certainly I am right," Mabel declared. "My apartment is around the next corner, Claire, number 112, if you will drop me there."

The girls were quite silent as Mabel indicated the apartment house and said good-bye, asking them both to come to see her. As they drove off, Claire was smiling and Rosanna was very grave.

"I wonder how she will come out," said Claire, as they turned toward Rosanna's house.

"It is perfectly *awful!*" exclaimed Rosanna.

"She says the Captain told her to," said Claire.

"I know she never meant her to go so far," wailed Rosanna. "Well, I shall tell her when I go home, and she will know what to do. Cita never makes a mistake."

"Cita?" said Claire. "That is Spanish."

"Yes," said Rosanna, smiling. "When she married my Uncle Robert she seemed so tiny and so dimply and young to be married to anyone that I told her that I meant to call her Cita. Why, I couldn't say *Aunt!* And she *is* Cita. She is dear. That is what it means."

"I know," said Claire. "She is a dear, I can agree with you there. I like her as well as I ever like anyone."

"Don't you *love* your friends?" asked Rosanna

wistfully. This strange green-eyed girl, so cold and so reserved, made her feel sad.

"I have no friends," replied Claire indifferently.

"Well, you will make a lot of friends here in Louisville," Rosanna assured her, smiling.

"No," said Claire. The car stopped before Rosanna's house.

"Oh, yes!" insisted Rosanna as she stood at the curb. "You see you will want friends when you grow up. Every girl does."

"Not I," said Claire, shaking her head. "I shall need no friends. Indeed I shall *want* no friends at the place I am going to when I grow up."

She dropped back against the cushions as though she was suddenly very tired and Rosanna, forgetting to move, watched the luxurious car bear its beautiful young owner away.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Rosanna finally, and with dragging feet went into the house to find Cita. But she was out, and Rosanna, puzzled and distressed, went to her own pleasant room, and curling up on a big divan tried to solve the new Scout's mysterious words. She forgot all about Miss Brewster, who at that moment, also curled up on a divan in her new apartment, had just happened to think that she was growing hungry and would have to get her own supper. She hurried out to the ice-chest and found it empty with the exception of three large, violent looking green pickles on a plate. Mabel bit one. It was very, very sour. Grabbing

her pocketbook, she hurried down to the nearest grocery and bought a loaf of bread, a pound of butter, some cold boiled ham, a glass of orange marmalade and a package of shredded wheat. With these packages in hand, she retraced her steps, the almost empty pocketbook swinging from her hand.

Supper was queer and not very cheerful, but Mabel knew that she would find it strange at first and the thought that part of her work lay before her that very night kept her spirits up. She had her telephoning to do.

She did not wash the cup and plate, but left them on the table to do in the morning. She was on her way to the telephone when the ringing of the bell made her jump. She seized the receiver. Mrs. Horton, the Scout Captain, was speaking.

"I have just heard the news, Mabel," she said pleasantly. "Isn't it wonderful? And you are really going to try out my experiment? It is wonderful to be able to live for yourself alone, isn't it? Nearly always we have duties that hold us back, and I know you are too good a Scout to disregard any of yours, but of course your mother has Frank, and he is *so* devoted to her that it really leaves you free. She says he always helps her as though he was a girl. I called you up to suggest that as long as you are making such a real test that it would be well to postpone the report you were going to bring to the meeting."

"I think so too," Mabel agreed hastily. "I know it will be a success, and if I can prove that girls are able to do for themselves, without having to do all sorts of other things like practicing and helping, at the same time, it will be a great thing for girls. Don't you think so?"

"I do indeed," Mrs. Horton assured her. "And just *think* what it will mean for mothers! They will be so free. As it is now, your mother, for instance, feels as though she ought to look after you and see that you have good clothes to wear to school and good food to eat, and she wants to fix a pretty room for you, and because you are studying and practicing she does a lot of darning for you and all that sort of thing, and probably she makes most of your dresses because they cost so much to buy these hard times.

"Why, by the time she has done all this, and has looked after you when you are ill, she has no time for herself. I called your mother up to get your address, and she seemed so pleased with everything. She said with Frank to help her, she was going to be able to do so much that she has been wanting to do ever since you were a baby. She and Frank are going to the theatre tonight, and tomorrow she is going to begin designing for that big firm on Fourth Street. I suppose she told you about it?" she added.

"No, she didn't," said Mabel, rather embarrassed to hear in this way of her own mother's plans.

"We were so busy today that we didn't get time to say much."

"Well, I am glad to be able to tell you good news," said the little Captain cheerily. "It will be so much off your mind to be able to go to sleep tonight and be sure that things are working out right. I think you are so brave, Mabel. I never would have the courage to do what you are doing, even though I am quite grown up. And you are really only a little girl in years."

"But I feel old in experience," sighed Mabel. She thought she heard a soft giggle at the other end of the wire, but at once Mrs. Horton coughed rather loudly and Mabel knew she was mistaken.

"That makes such a difference," said the Captain. "For my part, I am a *perfect goose*. I would be so lonesome and afraid there where you are, and I would rather do any amount of mending and dishes rather than go down and work in a stuffy newspaper office and beg a lot of women for items about their silly affairs. Yes, you are really very brave. You must call me once in awhile and let me know how you are progressing. And you need not come to the Scout meetings for awhile if you are busy. I will excuse you. I will explain to the girls just what you are doing to help them all. Good-night! Oh, your mother said for me to tell you good-night for her too as she was rushing off to the theatre, so there are two good-nights for you, Mabel dear. Good luck, and I hope you will

find time to ask me over to tea with you some afternoon."

"Indeed I will!" said Mabel. "Good-night!"

She turned from the receiver. Suddenly she felt very small and young, and the pretty rooms were stiller than the rooms at home somehow.

The subject for a poem flashed into her mind. And quick as a wink she made up the first verse:

"Alone, alone, the world before me.
What is this I leave behind?
Happiness and heat and mother;
All to train my wondrous mind."

Somehow *heat* did not sound very poetical, but the apartment was certainly freezing cold.

CHAPTER VI

WHILE eating a not too satisfactory supper on the corner of the kitchen table, Mabel was blissfully unaware of the fact that her venture into the world was being discussed at two dinner tables at least.

Rosanna, filled with misgivings, had repeated all that Mabel had said and she was distressed to see that Uncle Bob regarded it as a good joke, while his wife, the little Scout Captain, was convinced that the outcome would be exactly what she desired. And when Rosanna asked what that was, she laughed and said, "Wait and see."

Claire Maslin, telling her father about it, was met with shouts of laughter.

"The girl is crazy!" he merely said. "That fat little Brewster girl that ate so much candy here the other day? She will be sick of her bargain soon."

"I would like it myself," said Claire sullenly. "She can do exactly as she pleases. I wish *I* could."

"My poor little girl," said Colonel Maslin, "that is all in the world that ails you! I can run a regiment, but I don't seem able to run one girl. I wish you would try to see, my dear, that you are a lucky, very lucky young person, and act accordingly."

"*Lucky?*" said Claire bitterly. "You call *me*

lucky? Oh, it is not your fault, daddy! I am as sorry for you as I am for myself, but it is so funny to hear you use that word."

"Well, I call *myself* lucky," said Colonel Maslin, staring at the flowers that decorated the table.

"Do you? Why?" demanded Claire, her lip curling. She too stared at the flowers. She would not look at her father.

"I have your dear mother and I have you," he said after a long pause.

"I *am* a comfort to you, I am sure," she said in low, tense tone, "and mother must be a comfort too. You would be glad if we both —"

"Stop!" said Colonel Maslin sharply. "You remember you are never to speak unkindly of your poor mother. You are wrong, all wrong, and I would give my right hand if I could set you right, if I could make you understand what is honestly in my heart. When you are older you will perhaps understand."

"When I am older!" cried Claire. "When I am older —" She sat staring at her father, rigid and pale, then suddenly all her self-control deserted her. She leaned forward, burst into a storm of sobs, and pounded furiously on the table. Her voice tore out in a shrill scream. "When I am older — *you* know what I will be then!" she panted, and her sobs rose higher.

With a muttered exclamation Colonel Maslin rose from the table, dashed to his daughter's side, lifted

her in his arms, and as though she was still a little child he carried her to her room and laid her struggling and writhing, on her bed. Her maid entered hurriedly.

"Take care of her," he begged, and left the room.

An hour later he sat in little Mrs. Horton's own sitting-room and talked while she watched him with eyes made soft by unshed tears of sympathy.

"It is the first time I have asked for help," he said brokenly after awhile, and she sighed to see the gallant soldier bowed by grief. "But I have pinned my hope on the Girl Scouts, and now that I know you, on you. Save my little girl for me, dear lady, save her for her mother's sake! I need Claire so! And her coldness, her wild fits of temper, and her gloomy black moods are so unlike the sunny little tot she used to be that there are times when it seems as though I could never bear it. Is it always to be so, Mrs. Horton?"

"No!" cried the tiny Captain in quite a fierce voice. "*No indeed!* Something shall be done to help you. Claire has just made a wrong start, and her terrible sorrow, instead of making her more loving and more tender, has made her cold and hard. Don't worry, Colonel Maslin. Something shall be done."

Colonel Maslin shook his head. "I have about given up hope," he said sadly. "These fits of excitement are growing on her. At first I thought that they were plain temper, but it is not possible.

Why, Claire is in her teens, and her whole life has been a lesson in self-control! Our Chinaman is a living sermon on it. And she has been guarded against anything nerve racking or exciting or disagreeable."

"Let me think it over for a little," said Mrs. Horton, wrinkling her smooth brow. "I will find some way of reaching the poor child, I am sure. It may take a little time. Urge her to come to the Girl Scout meetings and I will watch her."

"You are more than good," and the Colonel bowed over the tiny hand that had met his in a firm, comforting grip.

She shook her head and said, "The Scouts themselves, one of them or all, will do it, I feel positive. That is one thing the Order is for, you know; to help one another."

"I trust you," said Colonel Maslin.

"Treat her as though nothing has happened this evening," suggested Mrs. Horton.

"I shall not see her again tonight. By the time I reach home (I shall have to drive up to Camp from here) she will be asleep. In the morning nothing will be said. Claire will simply be a little more sullen and aloof."

"Be of good cheer," smiled the little Captain, and Colonel Maslin went on his lonely and sorrowful way wondering if the little lady could really find a way to help his poor child.

In her own soft, luxurious bed, Claire was lying

spent and shaken by the storm she had just passed through. She tried to recall the talk at the dinner table, but in her dazed condition she could not remember anything that should have started such a dreadful scene. As she recalled her own actions, the cries and sobs, the tears and wild words, she shuddered. Each time she gave way like that seemed to be worse than the last. And Claire was proud. It shamed her to have her own father see her acting so, yet some dreadful Something within her seemed to make her explode in that way once in awhile. And the times were growing closer and closer. No matter what happened, even the greatest pleasures that her father planned for her filled her with a sort of hard anger. She hated everything and everybody. All she wanted was to be let alone, and then she read book after book until she was dull and dizzy. Then came long, sleepy rides in the limousine over smooth, uneventful roads.

When at length her maid brought her a glass of hot milk, she did not know that there was a sleeping powder in it, but sleep came quickly and mercifully and she did not waken until late the following morning.

A note was on the chair by her bedside, just the usual affectionate greeting from her father, a pretty little custom of his whenever he was obliged to leave before she was awake. No matter how hurried, he always took time to write a line or two

before he left. Any other girl would have been so proud and pleased with his unfailing tenderness and attention, but Claire wrapped herself round with coldness and accepted all he did for her without even the thanks she would have offered to a stranger.

She even hesitated to read the short, loving note. It bored her, she told herself. But she opened it idly and skimmed the words that told her that she must spend an easy day because he had planned a little surprise for Rosanna and Mabel and herself. Claire lifted her eyebrows. She had forgotten to tell her father that Mabel bored her to death. Rosanna was not quite so bad; in fact, she really liked the pretty, dark-eyed girl who seemed so warm-hearted and so sincere. Then with scarcely a thought of curiosity as to the nature of the surprise, she touched the bell that summoned the maid with her breakfast, and idly picking up a copy of the Handbook for Girl Scouts, commenced to read.

"A Girl Scout is loyal," she read, "to the President, to her country, and to her officers; to her father, to her mother —"

Claire stopped there, at least something stopped her. She read the words repeatedly, "Loyal to her father." What was loyalty anyway? She read on: "She remains true to them through thick and thin. In the face of the greatest difficulties and calamities, her loyalty must remain untarnished."

Claire frowned. *She* was faced with terrific diffi-

culties, while a frightful calamity, like a black cloud, darkened all her future. What did loyalty to her father mean in her case? She read on: "A Girl Scout is cheerful under all circumstances." Claire thought of her wild ravings the night before, and frowned. She skipped down the page to a short paragraph that her eyes seemed unable to avoid.

"Kipling in *Kim* says that there are two kinds of women,— one kind that builds men up, and the other that pulls men down; and there is no doubt as to where a Girl Scout should stand."

Now Claire in her most selfish moods could not blind herself to the fact that her violent scenes were always followed by days of deep mournfulness on the part of her father. Lines appeared in his handsome face and his hair seemed to grow grayer. Was she pulling her father down? She refused to answer the question, and flirted the pages over to escape that part. She scanned the qualifications for the three grades of Girl Scouts. She was only a Second-Class Scout, and she knew that she was a poor one at that. She had been too indolent to try for the First Class. She read the necessary qualifications over.

She could not set a table for any meal, and she could not sew. She had never tried to walk a mile in twenty minutes, and as for dressing or bathing a child, Claire wondered where she could borrow one to try on. She could not pass the First Aid

or the International alphabet exam. She could not train a Tenderfoot; at least it was too much trouble, and while she could name ten trees, ten wild flowers, ten wild animals and ten wild birds, they were all Chinese. She could swim; oh, *how* she could swim! A thrill of joy shook her as she thought of past hours spent in soft tropic waters. As for fifty cents in bank earned by herself, that was so funny that Claire laughed aloud. She could not imagine earning *five* cents, let alone fifty.

That brought her thoughts around to Mabel Brewster, and Claire saw her in a new light.

There was a lucky girl even if she *was* silly and conceited. She believed in herself and had gone off alone to fight the world, with all her banners flying. Yet there was that loyalty law cropping up again. What if Mabel *could* write as splendidly as she said, wasn't her place really at home with her mother and brother? Claire was sure the Brewsters were not rich, and in that case Mrs. Brewster certainly needed help. Loyalty; always loyalty! A new and disturbing thought flashed over Claire. Perhaps she owed her own mother some loyalty too, even though she was away in a sanitarium. Wasn't it loyalty to her to keep her troubled, lonely and unhappy father "built up" so far as it lay in her power?

Claire closed the little offending blue book and flung it across the room and when her maid entered she was lying petulantly with her head on her arm,

her glorious red hair streaming over her like a glittering veil.

The little book, so helpful and so uplifting, had not helped Claire at all. But that was because in her heart she did not want to be helped. She had lived for herself so long in her queer, cold, brooding fashion that the thought of anything different actually hurt her just as it hurts to stand on one's foot when it is asleep. Claire had held one position of thought for so long that it made her hurt and sting and prickle even to think of moving. So she buried her face in her arm and hid under her shining red hair and studied her queer jade ring and tried to forget the feeling that she might be in the wrong.

Mabel Brewster's awakening was even more disagreeable, although she really deserved it less. She was not accustomed to pickles and cold ham and cheese for supper, as Mrs. Brewster was a careful mother. Also Mabel, to celebrate her great step, had found a light novel, and snapping on a perfectly fascinating reading light at the head of her bed, had proceeded to read until after one o'clock. Then she dreamed! She dreamed that she tried to get out of bed and couldn't because there was a sour green pickle as large as a street car right in the way, and the City Editor sat on top and looked at her from under his green shade and told her that the only way that she could get out was by eating her way through the pickle. So she

commenced, while all the society ladies in Louisville looked on and said, "Dear me, isn't it wonderful what a girl can accomplish if she will only leave home, and *live for herself?*" And the pickle was so sour that it made Mabel shudder with cold and she shuddered herself awake, to find all the bedclothes on the floor. She got up and made the bed over, and found it was only three o'clock, although she had been hours and hours trying to eat that frightful pickle. The bed was too soft or too hard or something, and she could not get to sleep again for a long while. She was glad to waken again and find that it was morning. Unfortunately, after all the adventures of the night Mabel had overslept and was obliged to start off to school without breakfast and with her hair ribbon badly tied. Also there was no time to put the apartment in order, and Mabel was rather shocked to find how badly one person could tumble things up.

She half hoped her mother would run around during the morning and put things in shape, but when she unlocked her door at one o'clock, when school was over for the day, she found her bed still unmade, her clothes tumbling out of the suitcase, and the soiled dishes on the kitchen table.

She had cold boiled ham for luncheon, and but little of that because just as she commenced to eat, a telephone call interrupted her. It was Miss Gere asking how soon she would be down with her items and to take up some other work. The items were

not written up, and Mabel had to give up her luncheon time to writing them. There was no time to tidy up, and Mabel hurried down town hoping now with all her heart and soul that her mother would not get time to use the duplicate key that Mabel had insisted on her taking. She felt her cheeks burn as she thought of her mother seeing the mess and cleaning it up in her kind way.

Mabel had no cause to worry. When her mother dropped in about four o'clock she merely looked the place over, then sat down and laughed in the strangest manner. Then she carefully went out without disturbing anything, and took a covered basket into the apartment below where she talked for awhile with Mabel's grandmother, who laughed too; laughed hard and long, and who then said mysteriously, "Well, thank you for the rolls, my dear! I think they will do me more good than they would Mabel. And I think I shall not be 'at home' for the next week or so."

Mabel did not get home until six o'clock. She had forgotten to stop at the market, so she had only shredded wheat and milk and pickle for supper. She ate shredded wheat and milk. It was a modern apartment with thin walls. Somebody was having chops and baked apples for supper, and a few minutes later there was a smell of fried chicken. Mabel helped herself to another shredded wheat biscuit.

CHAPTER VII

A WEEK passed. In one corner of the *Times-Leader* office there was an old-fashioned letterpress. You put the letters between two iron plates and slowly turned a bar that pressed a lever that squeezed the plates together tighter and tighter. A grimy office boy was forever grinding, and as Mabel had many a long wait for her chief, Miss Gere, she commenced to be fascinated by the operation. Her vivid imagination commenced to trouble her. She saw her hand, her arm, her whole self being pressed flat by that dreadful boy. The boy, by the way, being about Mabel's age and totally unconscious of his grubby appearance, noticed Mabel's fascinated stare and accepted it as a personal compliment. He turned the press with a grand flourish and squeezed it close with a darkly frowning brow as though to call attention to his strength.

Life, after being so eagerly called, was beginning to squeeze Mabel a little. Saturday noon found her half ill for food, as she had spent her small allowance almost at once and had had to live on the faithful box of shredded wheat biscuit and the milk for which she did not have to pay the milkman until the first of the month.

After luncheon, consisting of a nut sundae which took all her remaining change, she spent a few moments peering in at the vegetables and chickens displayed in a grocer's window. She did not see Miss Gere pass. When Mabel returned to the office, Miss Gere sent her up Fourth Street to study the delicatessens and bread shops. It was agony. Mabel had never seen such delicious articles of food, had never dreamed of such penetrating and tantalizing odors. Mabel wondered if she could ever stand it until six o'clock when she would be paid. She jotted down her notes and, wending her way back to the office, settled down in a corner to put her material in shape. It did not take long, and while she waited for Miss Gere who was almost always out, she reviewed the experiences that had beset her during the past few days. Of them all this day had been the worst. And Mabel, who had fondly expected to have most of her Saturdays to herself, reflected that after six o'clock she would have to take her hungry and weary self back to the apartment and attempt to clean things up.

The dainty rooms looked as though a whirlwind had struck them. Poor Mabel was not wholly to blame. She was carrying too great a load. She had school to think of, and as soon as she was released at noon she was obliged to rush off to the dusty office for her orders for the rest of the day. She never reached home again until six and later, and on several occasions she had been obliged to

accompany Miss Gere on long tiresome night trips by automobile or trolley into the surrounding country. Of her mother she had seen but little. Twice her mother had called while she was out with Miss Gere, and Mabel, not knowing that this had been by arrangement between Mrs. Brewster and Miss Gere, was honestly disappointed. Several times she had met her mother down town, and once they had had luncheon together at a cafeteria.

On these occasions Mabel was forced to notice that her mother, whom she had rather looked down on as a common or garden variety of parent, was really a most attractive and charming woman. She treated Mabel not at all like a little girl, spoke only of the surface things that interested Mrs. Brewster herself and lightly passed over all Mabel's wistful references to home and Frank. Mrs. Brewster did say that they missed Mabel and added with a rather sad smile that she had never thought to lose her little daughter and so on. Mabel felt herself saddened by these meetings. She found that she was thinking of her mother all the time, and sometimes she almost wished that she was just an ordinary girl and not a genius, so she could stay at home and be taken care of. When the second Sunday came Mabel permitted herself the luxury of a good cry. She was too stubborn to confess that she was desperately sick of her foolishness and wholly and utterly homesick, but angrily dried her tears and started to dress.

The telephone rang. It was Mrs. Brewster. She sent a cheery good-morning over the wire and asked if Mabel had had breakfast. Mabel hopefully said no, that she was just commencing to dress.

"Why, we are all through!" laughed Mrs. Brewster. "We are getting an early start, because the Morrissons have asked us to drive to Lexington with them. They wanted to ask you too, but I told them that you were always too taken up with your other affairs and your writing to accept any invitations and they were so disappointed."

"Who is going?" asked Mabel.

"Just the two Morrisson boys and Frank and myself."

The two Morrisson boys were quite the most popular young fellows in Louisville and Mabel saw, with a sense of defeat, that her biggest social chance had slipped from her grasp.

Her mother went cheerily on: "So Frank and I got up early and fixed our share of the luncheon, and prepared and ate our own breakfast, and now we are all ready."

Mabel was furious. It was on her tongue's end to tell her mother that of course she would be glad to go, but her stubbornness held her back, so she said a brief and snippy good-bye and hung up the receiver. But she did not leave the phone. A moment later she gave central Mrs. Morrisson's number, and flushed rather foolishly as she heard Mrs. Morrisson call hello.

"I want to thank you for having thought to ask me on your ride today Mrs. Morrisson," she said smoothly, in her best manner. I was just talking to mother, and she told me about it." Mabel stopped here and listened eagerly for Mrs. Morrisson to renew the coveted invitation. But alas, poor Mabel!

"We were all sorry that you could not go," said Mrs. Morrisson in a sweet voice that you would never think could deal a blow to a girl's hopes. "And it is almost going to spoil the day for your mother, I know. She is always so happy when you are with her, my dear."

"It is dear of you all to want me," said Mabel, "and perhaps I can arrange things so I can go after all."

"Oh, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Morrisson in a most distressed voice, "that is too awful! You see we never thought you would think of it, so I asked another girl, a new girl the boys have met in dancing school. She is a Girl Scout and your mother thought it was just the thing to do."

Mabel swallowed hard.

"Well, I am sure she will have a good time," she replied in a thin voice. "Is she a girl I know?"

"Her name is Claire Maslin," said Mrs. Morrisson, "and I think she is really charming."

"I know her," said Mabel briefly and with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm.

She was glad when the conversation came to an

end, and rushing back to her tumbled bed, she threw herself down and wept loudly and long. When finally she found that she could cry no more she dragged on her dress anyhow and went out to look in the tiny ice-chest. She knew what it contained. There was the usual ready-to-eat cereal and milk for her breakfast, and two discouraged looking pieces of cold boiled ham, her unfailing standby, on a saucer; but she had neglected to do any shopping the day before in the rush of necessary tasks, and there was nothing else to eat. For all day! Sunday! And mother and Frank were off on a glorious picnic! Once more Mabel wept. She set the cereal back and went wearily into the living-room. The bell rang, but Mabel did not care who it was; she did not want to see anyone. She heard a rush of feet on the stairs, and the door knob was shaken violently as her brother Frank called through the crack:

"Hey, Mabe, let me in a second! Hurry up! Here's something for you!"

Mabel rushed to the door and let him in. He had a large box in his hand.

"Hello, sis!" he roared cheerfully. "Here's a box mother sent you. She is down in the car, but I told her not to come upstairs. I don't want her to get tired. She sent you some dinner. It's good, I can tell you! Helped to fix it myself. She thought it would be a change from the swell eats you must be buying yourself. Just notice the

chicken salad. And she said for you to — but there is a note inside. Sorry you can't come! Strange girl going, and I don't like 'em. Nuisance to get acquainted. Why, what's wrong, Mabe?" he asked as he looked at her for the first time and noticed her tear stained face. "Gosh, what's wrong? Are you sick? Shall I call mother?" He put an awkward but loving arm around his sister, but she shoved him violently away.

"Nothing's wrong!" she jerked out, her lips trembling in spite of her. "Go along, and don't mind me!" She fairly pushed him toward the door and Frank, dazed and astonished, allowed himself to be hurried into the small hallway.

There he faced her. "Why don't you get some common sense into your head?" he asked savagely. "I think it's a crime your coming here and trying to live by yourself! I am ashamed to have the fellows know about it. They think it is awfully queer. Fellows like to look after their sisters. It isn't right! I don't care if you *are* a smart kid! You can be just as smart over home as you can here. You don't seem to think of mother at all. You don't care how *she* feels. She would skin me if she knew I was saying this to you, but I'll say you are the most selfish girl I ever knew and that's the truth! Well, go ahead! We don't care; we can rustle along without you!" He started for the stairs and flung this over his shoulder: "But I bet you will be sorry some day!"

He hurried out of sight as a shrill whistle sounded from the street where the Morrisson boys fretted in the waiting car.

Mabel picked up the box and carried it into the kitchen. Then for the third time that day she rushed into her bed-room, fell on the long-suffering bed and cried; cried tears of mingled rage and disappointment. She could not understand why Frank's ravings, as she called his outburst, should make her feel so strangely mean and small and in the wrong when she positively *knew* that she was on the right track. But you cannot live principally on cold boiled ham, olives and shredded wheat day in and out, you cannot leave a comfy, homey sort of home even for the luxury of a modern apartment without a pang of homesickness hitting you sooner or later, and Mabel was pierced with it. And you can't have good reason for tears three times in one morning without losing a little of your courage, at least for the time being. Mabel thought of the jolly party motoring along the level roads, all laughing over the sallies of the older Morrisson boy. She could almost see Claire Maslin in her lovely green motor coat and close hat set tight over the shining red hair.

Mabel burrowed her wet face deeper in the moist pillow. Her sobs rose.

"Oh, oh, I wish I was home!" she whispered finally, and then, like the martyr that she felt herself, she sat up, wiped her eyes, and wondered what

was in the box her mother had sent over. Things to eat, Mabel reflected, as she opened parcel after parcel and found that a whole Sunday dinner was hers. She put it in the ice-box and wearily started to clear up the dusty and untidy rooms. The sink was full of dishes, and as soon as the water was hot in the boiler, she attacked the piles of plates and cereal dishes. By the time they were washed and dried and put away and the rooms swept and dusted, Mabel was too tired to think of getting herself any dinner, even though it was waiting for her in the box her mother had sent over. So she curled up in a corner of the divan and tried to read. She could not interest herself in her novel, and at last she sat staring moodily at the room, studying its complicated and fussy furnishings and comparing them with the simple, quiet arrangement of her mother's house. Mabel had had occasion to see a number of homes during the time she had worked with Miss Gere and it was dawning on Miss Mabel that there was a certain charm and beauty about her mother's simple and unpretentious arrangements that were sadly lacking in many of the most luxurious places. She had never thought of this until a woman who stood very high in the social world of Louisville had asked her if she was related to the Mrs. Brewster who was doing interior decorating. Mabel flushed with embarrassment and said in a small voice that Mrs. Brewster was her mother.

"How fortunate you are!" said the great lady.

"Your mother is the most artistic person I have ever known. She is perfectly wonderful and will certainly make a fortune. I am trying to get her to go to New York where she can have a studio and command top prices. I don't see why she did not go into this years and years ago."

Mabel, almost too surprised to reply, managed to mumble that she supposed her mother had been pretty busy bringing up her brother Frank and herself.

"Well, I suppose she feels that she is really free now," said the lady with a smile, "since you are starting out for yourself. Although," she added, "I think your mother is very brave to let you start out of the nest so soon. You seem such a young girl to be off by yourself. Of course it is not at all my affair, but I should think that you would hate to be away from such a talented mother as yours."

As Mabel recalled this conversation, she saw her mother in a new light and somehow the new light blazed almost too strongly on Mabel herself. She felt strangely small. She had this disagreeable dwindling sensation more and more as she compared her mother with other women in professional and business and social circles, the three great groups that made their influence strongly felt throughout the city.

Mabel found too that her Great Experiment, instead of bringing her the envy and admiration of

her mates, seemed in some strange way to make her the object of a kind of scorn that was very hard to bear. The very girls who had applauded her most loudly at first showed her in unmistakable small ways that she was doing something foolish instead of something brave and grand. But Mabel would not give in. She was not brave enough.

It was an endless Sunday. She did not go to church, no one came to see her, and she would not go for her usual afternoon walk. Several times she started for the phone, intending to call Rosanna or Helen, then decided against it. Finally she took up the long neglected Girl Scout Manual and read steadily as far as the page that had caught Claire's attention.

"Loyalty." The word stood out black and threatening on the page. "Loyalty to father and mother." Was she loyal to her talented mother, the mother who had laid aside all her gifts in order to give all her time and strength to her two children? Wasn't it her place now to lighten some of her mother's household cares and make it possible for her to gain the reward she deserved?

Mabel, like Claire, threw the book angrily away from her. But unlike Claire, she could not throw her thoughts away. She was very unhappy.

CHAPTER VIII

THE following morning, however, Mabel was once more filled with her usual self-esteem. Before going to sleep she had written a poem which would have sounded more original if it had not been so very like several well-known bits of verse she had often read. But to Mabel it seemed to spring from her soul, and after reading it with tears of appreciation in her eyes, she decided to let the *Times-Leader* have the privilege of printing it.

That was to be a strange, terrible and eventful Monday. The Day of Overheard Conversations Mabel might have named it.

There was nothing to warn her of the day's disagreeable outcome. It was one of Louisville's loveliest mornings, and there was enough left from her Sunday dinner to give her a good breakfast. She was up early enough to go over her lessons, and the apartment as she left it after Sunday's violent cleaning had a look of righteous order and dustlessness. Also, having read the poem a number of times, Mabel saw herself as the coming poetess and preened herself accordingly.

One of the nicest girls in high school overtook Mabel and they walked to school together. It was

in the cloak-room that Mabel received her first stab. The other stepped around the end of a cloak rack where she was met by a third girl whom Mabel knew but slightly.

"Hello, Grace," she heard her say. "I stopped at your house but you had gone."

"Yes, I walked to school with Mabel Brewster," replied Grace.

"Well, how you can stand her *I* don't know," said the other girl with a sniff. "Of all the stupid prigs she is the worst!"

"Oh, I wouldn't say *that,*" said Grace gently.

"Well, *I* would!" declared the other girl stubbornly. "She thinks she is a wonder and knows everything, when in fact she is stupid and conceited, and *no* one likes her."

Grace was a Girl Scout and this talk shocked her. She shook her head. "I don't think you are really right, Mary, and besides I don't think you ought to speak so."

"It is true, just the same," said the girl stubbornly. "You know yourself what her marks are — just as low as she can stand and pass. And that way she has of smiling in such a superior way when anyone else misses. And when *she* misses she always has such a good excuse! I do wonder why the teachers stand for it!"

A group of laughing and chattering girls came into the cloak-room and Mabel seized the opportunity to slip into the hall and into the class-room.

Her face burned. Of course she told herself that the girl was jealous, but Mabel was one of those persons who require the approval and admiration of those about her in order to be happy.

She did such poor work that morning that she was obliged to stay after school, although she knew that she ought to be at the office. She took her books to a desk in the reference library where she was soon lost in her work.

Presently she heard the low voices of a couple of teachers. They came and seated themselves on the other side of a big blackboard just behind Mabel.

"Oh, dear," sighed one of them, "this weather makes me long for vacation."

"The last weeks of school are always a drag," answered the other. "And I think the children feel it as much as we teachers. Even my brightest pupils are letting down, and the marks have all fallen off."

"Even Mabel Brewster's marks?" queried Miss Jones with a sniff.

"What a goose that girl is!" said Miss Hannibal. "I don't know what does ail her."

"An inflated ego," said Miss Jones.

"Novels and the New Woman Movement, I think," said Miss Hannibal. "It is a perfect shame. I feel *so* sorry for her mother. Here this girl, as soon as she gets where she would naturally be of some service and comfort to her mother,

steps gaily out of all her responsibilities and home duties and sets up a home of her own and goes around talking about a career. *Career,* indeed! Why, the child has nothing to career *on!* She did not inherit her mother's cleverness. If she was *my* child, I would send her to her room and keep her there on bread and water until she came to her senses."

"So would I," said Miss Jones, "but it is really none of our business, of course."

"Well, in a way it is," answered Miss Hannibal testily. "You see she is doing very poor school work, and the Principal told me yesterday that he would probably have to drop her from her class at the end of the school year. And she *won't* work, because she is so crazy over that silly newspaper job that she simply neglects everything else. I just *don't* see what ails her mother!"

"Does her mother know what poor work she is doing in school?" asked Miss Jones.

"I don't know," said Miss Hannibal. "And I don't know what good it would do if she did. A girl who thinks as little of her mother as Mabel does would not care what she thought and would not listen to her advice. You may be sure that she has cost her mother many bitter tears already. *I* shan't worry about her. She spoils my thoughts. I have wanted to ask you how the Morrisson boys are doing."

Miss Jones proceeded to enthuse over the Morris-

sons, but for once their achievements did not interest Mabel at all. She was stunned and angry. Yet as she sat huddled motionless in her corner, waiting for the teachers to go, she soon recovered her balance, and reflected that they too were probably jealous. She thought fondly of her position on the newspaper and proudly dreamed her dream of the day when she would drift into the magic circle of the Chief Editor's desk as his best reporter.

When Miss Hannibal and Miss Jones sauntered away, Mabel lost no time in making good her own escape. She crossed over to Third Street where the beautiful houses with their look of reserve and wealth always catered to her love of luxury. Ahead were three girls in Girl Scout uniforms. She recognized them at once: Rosanna Horton with her black docked hair, Claire Maslin's long swinging red braid and Elise Hargrave's bobbing curls. At first Mabel decided to walk slowly and avoid them but she changed her mind and caught up with them.

"Do you still like the work you are doing?" asked Claire in her soft drawl.

"I suppose so," said Mabel, and then as though forced into honesty, she added, "The trouble is, I miss mother and Frank so that I don't seem to do all the work I planned after all. It doesn't seem to be working out right. Of course I shall go on with it, because I really owe it to myself,

but it isn't half the fun I thought it was going to be."

"I knew it," said Elise Hargrave gently. "It is a most dreadful thing to be *torn* from the home nest, and when one hops out by one's self and waves that not so strong wing one must of a necessity wish to be back."

"Why don't you give up and go home?" said Rosanna. "You would be doing the wise thing."

"No, I can't," said Mabel. "I suppose some day when I am famous, I will perhaps take mother and Frank to live with me." She laughed and nodded as she left the girls and hurried on to the *Times-Leader* office.

"She means it; she actually *means* it!" said Rosanna in a hushed voice.

"Of course she means it!" laughed Claire. "Isn't she funny? I never saw a girl so conceited in my life. And really she *isn't* bright at all. She is just an ordinary girl with ordinary gifts. I think she is usually quite stupid when she talks, but perhaps that is because she is so awfully conceited that it bores you."

"I hate to hear you say such things about her," said the tender-hearted Rosanna.

When Mabel reached the office she went directly to the big shabby dictionary open on its stand, and looked up two words, *Inflated,* and *ego.* The result was not pleasing! She sat before the book, glooming over the unflattering result of her quest. So

she had an "inflated ego," had she? As she sat there, the office boy, seeing her close to his letter-press and feeling himself capable of starting an acquaintance with any girl his own size, pulled his purple and gold necktie into place, seized a few sheets of paper, and sauntered up. Mabel continued to stare at the open page of the dictionary.

"Kiddin' me," thought the boy to himself. He put the papers in place, and commenced to whistle, one careful eye on Mabel. He whistled so far off the key that she looked up. Instantly he grinned.

"Great job, this!" he said cheerfully, twisting the lever with a vast show of effort. "I bet I work harder than any fellow in this office. I bet I work harder than the Chief himself." Mabel continued to look at him, but did not speak, and he continued, "Your name is Brewster; Mabel Brewster, isn't it? I saw it on some of the papers Miss Gere and the Chief threw in the waste basket. Say, what do you write such gobs of stuff for? They don't use it. Aren't you on to that yet? My name's Jesse Hart. Ain't that a peach of a name to give a fellow? Sounds like a sure-nuff girl's name — Jesse. And Hart means a deer. Fellows used to call me Jessie dear when I was a kid, but I knocked a couple of 'em out and they quit it." He grinned at Mabel more cheerfully than before. "Say, you don't wear yourself out talkin', do you, sis?"

Mabel flushed with anger. A couple of the reporters saw the two and smiled playfully.

"Jessie dear" winked back and Mabel flushed.

"I don't want to talk to you," she said distinctly. "I wish you would go away."

"Suits me!" said Jesse. "Suits me all right, Miss High-Mighty." He gave a short laugh with a close imitation of the manner of Dalton Duplex, his movie star villain, and strutted off. Mabel noted that the rims of his ears were very red. She dismissed him angrily from her thoughts and went over to Miss Gere's desk.

The thin man pounded furiously on the next typewriter as usual, but he looked up as she passed him. "A new crush, Miss Mabel?" he asked mischievously.

Mabel was too angry to answer; she rudely flounced into the chair and turned her burning face away.

Surely, she thought, there *never* was another girl who had so many things to annoy her. That silly boy! As though she would bother to look at him. The two immaculate Morrissons flashed through her mind. Such boys and their friends were well worth while. Then her mind turned to the remark about the waste basket. She wondered if her work was being thrown away. She knew that it was always rewritten, but she thought that was the rule of the office. Mabel had a lot to think of.

The next morning Jesse proceeded to prove that he was a youth of grit and determination. He wore another necktie, and when he saw Mabel sit-

ting at Miss Gere's desk he went over and grinned a cheerful good-morning. Mabel returned it glumly with a stony stare that would have quelled a less determined boy.

"Say, how about a picnic Sunday afternoon?" he asked without noting the drop in temperature. "I thought we could ask your mother to chaperone us, and get your brother Frank, and a couple of other fellows and have supper at Jacobs' park. The chaps have a car and they know two dandy girls."

"No," said Mabel decidedly. "It isn't possible for me to go. I am sure mother wouldn't go, nor Frank." She spoke so sneeringly that Jesse flushed.

"That's where you guess again, Miss Highty-Mighty!" he said. "I saw Frank last night and he asked his mother, and she said *sure*, so I guess I just get another girl for little me, and you needn't think I don't know where to get off. I won't trouble you again, so don't you worry." He stalked off, leaving Mabel furious to think that Frank and her mother were going to go with that dreadful boy and his dreadful friends. She could just *see* the sort they must be: the girls like a lot of the girls she knew in high school, giggly, silly, gum-chewing girls, with untidy ruffed-up hair pulled over their ears, and boys like Jesse. She sent a cautious glance after Jesse. After all there was nothing really the matter with him, except

she just didn't like his neckties, and oh well, he wasn't a bit like the Morrissons, for instance, who always looked as though they had come out of a bandbox, and were so polite, and *such* fun.

That night going home, Mabel met Frank. He seemed to be always hanging around the corner nearest the *Times-Leader* office when she came out at night and always walked home with her.

"Jess says you won't go on our picnic," Frank commenced at once.

"Why, of course not!" said Mabel. "I am perfectly surprised to think that you and mother would mix with such people!"

"Such people?" repeated Frank. "*What* people?"

"Why, the sort that Jesse boy must go around with. Of course I know how mother is. She would chaperone anyone who wanted her, but I should think *you* would know enough to keep her out of it."

"Well, I don't see how you figure it," said Frank sulkily. "I am going to take Helen Culver. She is all right, isn't she? And Jess was going to take you, and I bet you think *you* are all right, and Rosanna Horton and that Maslin girl are going with Jesse's cousins. Pretty good crowd, I take it."

"Who are his cousins, for mercy sake?" demanded Mabel.

"Don't you know?" asked Frank. "The Morrissons, of course! You know their father owns the *Times-Leader*."

CHAPTER IX

Leaving Mabel to recover as best she could from Frank's astounding announcement, we will look in on Rosanna listening, round eyed and breathless, to her Uncle Bob talking rapidly to his mother, his wife, and his little niece.

"Oh, do you *really* mean it?" Rosanna exclaimed at last.

"Cross my heart, sweetness!" Uncle Bob assured her. "Cross my heart and black my eye, *hope* to live and *haf* to die!"

Rosanna leaned back with a sigh of absolute delight. "I never dreamed anything so perfectly splendiferous," she murmured. "Wait until I tell the girls about it!"

"That is the only disagreeable part, dear," said her uncle. "What I have told you is a great secret. In fact, no one but just our four selves must know a single thing about our plans until a week before we sail. I am sorry, because I know what fun it would be to talk over a trip around the world, but there are very important business reasons why it must be kept absolutely quiet."

"All right, uncle, but that means we will have to talk it over twice as much ourselves. So tell it all over, please!"

"Well," said Uncle Bob, not at all unwilling to talk, "John Culver's invention makes it possible to arrange our machinery in such a way that it is possible to use it under almost any and all conditions. It is changing the whole course of big institutions and vast enterprises will be affected by it. It is such a big thing that it must be laid before the heads of governments, and it has fallen to my lot to attend to this part of the business. So for the first trip I am going to start across the Atlantic, cut nearly straight across the continent, come home by Japan and Honolulu, *and* you are all going with me!"

"But how about school?" wailed Rosanna.

"Oh, bother school!" said Uncle Bob, with an uncomfortable glance at Rosanna's grandmother. "What's school to us? We are going a-jaunting whether school keeps or not!" He laughed. "We will be off and away as soon as ever we can."

"Hurray!" cried Rosanna, hopping up and down. "Oh, grandmother, will you really let us?"

Her grandmother looked at her son, then at his wife. They both sparkled.

"I think I shall have to," she said. "But, Rosanna, I don't know what is going to become of your education if these people keep on taking us with them wherever they go."

"Oh, but grandmother dear, think of all the wonderful things I will see, and the languages I will hear, and the people, the queer dear people!"

"I should say so!" said Mrs. Horton dryly. "And the *algebra* you will miss! How wonderful it will be!"

The next few days were so exciting that Rosanna could scarcely bear it. She was glad when Claire Maslin telephoned over to see if she would come and spend the week-end with her in the house her father had just taken. Both Mrs. Horton and Cita were glad to have Rosanna go, for she was so excited over the coming journey that she went wandering about the house like a restless spirit and could neither read, practice nor study.

Claire was drifting into one of her black moods. The Colonel had learned that his wife had taken a turn for the worse, and had felt that he must tell Claire. She had heard it in stony silence, with dry eyes and compressed lips, her only comment being, "It is coming soon, isn't it, dad?"

Then after a sleepless night and a bad day she asked Rosanna to come and stay with her, hoping that she could forget her horrors for awhile. But after a few hours spent with the gentle loving little Scout, she was conscious of quite a new sensation. For the first time in her life she wanted to confide all her troubles to someone; someone who would sympathize with her. She thought almost tenderly of her new friend. Rosanna's low and pleasant voice, soft friendly eyes, so deep and loving, her air of truth, all made poor Claire who had been so friendless and so cold feel that here at

last was one whom she could trust; one to whom she could tell all her worries and troubles. But the caution which usually held her steady kept her from saying anything to Rosanna, even when a telegram was handed to her father at the dinner table; a telegram that deepened the lines in his face and caused him to glance apprehensively at Claire with a slight shake of the head.

Claire felt the black cloud of horror closing down on her. She managed to finish the meal, letting her father and Rosanna do most of the talking. Then she excused herself and went to her room.

She expected that her father would follow her and give her the news. Claire felt that it was something bad: but Rosanna came bounding up, calling cheerily as she came, "Hurry up, Claire! Get into your uniform; it is Scout night!"

"I don't believe I will go to the meeting tonight," said Claire, but Rosanna exclaimed, "Oh, Claire dear, we don't want to miss it, do we? Besides, your father said specially that you were to go, and we are going to be late if we don't hurry, so he is going to drive us over in the car. Won't it be fun to go back to my own home from somewhere else to attend a meeting?" She slipped out of her little net dinner dress as she talked and into her crisp, clean uniform, and Claire found herself following Rosanna's example. When she stepped into the waiting car, her father murmured in her ear, "No change!" and she sighed with relief.

It was a specially good meeting. Only one girl was absent, Mabel Brewster, and the Captain was careful to explain that that was at *her* suggestion. After the business meeting and the usual reports and the giving of several badges of merit, the Captain said with a smile:

"I have been in Washington nearly all the week, girls, as some of you know, and while there I had a very interesting Scout experience. I wanted to consult with one of the most prominent Scout Captains there, a lady named Mrs. Pain, the wife of a Washington artist. Well, I made arrangements to call at her house and as luck would have it, it was the night of a Scout meeting. Of course I was very glad to see how they conducted their meetings and all that. I found Mrs. Pain most charming, and her apartment quite delightful.

"A blond angel of a baby about three years old was skipping around here and there. She was dressed in a complete Scout uniform and, girls, she looked *exactly* like a big doll! I thought of course she was Mrs. Pain's child, and she is, but with a very interesting history. When I spoke to Mrs. Pain about the pretty little thing, Mrs. Pain smiled and gave me this paper. It is a copy of the Washington *Times*, and this is what it says:

"MABEL, FIRST CIRCULATING BABY IN WORLD, IS ONLY THREE, BUT SHE'S SOME GIRL."

"This little story will introduce Miss Mabel Pain, three years old, the youngest and tiniest Girl Scout in the world. Mabel lives right here in Washington, at the Graystone Apartments, and she is the mascot of Girl Scout Troop No. 3, composed of Graystone girls.

"Although only three years of age, Mabel has had a varied and romantic career, and if the remainder of her life holds for her as much excitement as she has experienced during her baby years, she will be quite a wonder long before she grows gray-headed. Indeed, Mabel already is a little wonder, for she can swim, hike three miles without getting tired, say grace as solemnly as a bishop, recite her A B C's backward, repeat the Girl Scout oath of allegiance to the flag, say all of the ten Girl Scout laws, salute with the snap of a West Point cadet, and do many other things the average child of six or seven would have great difficulty in doing.

"And all this is the more interesting because Mabel was once a little waif, without parents and without a home. Her origin remains a mystery, and little Mabel herself has no recollection of her mamma and papa. Mabel was discovered when the girls of Troop 3 decided that they wanted to adopt a baby, a real *live* baby that would coo and cry and kick and laugh, and all that. It was a big job for a group of girls to adopt a baby as a substitute for their dollies — and their troop leader probably would have vetoed the whole fine plan had the little

girls not pleaded with their mothers and fathers and persuaded them to approve the project.

"So a search was made for a baby to adopt, and little Mabel eventually was found. All the little girls clapped their hands, and danced in glee. They had a baby, and they were so pleased. But the question arose: Now that the girls had the baby, what in the world were they going to do with it? And thus it was that Mabel became the world's first 'circulating baby,' for the girls decided that they would keep the baby successively for a couple of weeks at a time at their various homes, the mothers first giving their approval, of course.

"So Mabel lived one week with Harriet's parents, another week at Pauline's home, and still another week at Mary's residence. She shifted from home to home just like a book in a circulating library.

"Everywhere she went she was looked upon as a sort of toy or pet, to be played with and humored, and then passed on to someone else.

"So it went until Mabel landed at the home of Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Pain of the Graystone Apartments. Mrs. Pain is Captain of Troop 3 and from the start she had taken a keen interest in the baby. Mr. Pain also fell in love with Mabel, and thus it came about that Mabel ceased to be a 'circulating baby,' for the Pains decided that they would like to keep her for good and all, and little Mabel was formally adopted.

"The Pains are English people of culture and

refinement, and as a result the little waif now has a wonderful home. Mr. Pain is an artist, and Mrs. Pain is a trained instructor of children and between the two, fate has made it possible for Mabel to develop into a very fine girl.

"A girl cannot become a full-fledged member of the Scouts until she is ten years old and the girls under ten are formed into an organization known as the Brownies. But it wouldn't be safe for anyone to accuse Mabel of being a Brownie, for in her grown-up way she would immediately announce: 'I am not a Brownie at *all!* I am a regular Girl Scout!'

"Mabel would be quite right in saying so. For although technically she is not a Scout, she attends all of the Scout meetings, goes on all the Scout hikes and does *whatever* the rest of the Scouts do. She gets around the ten year age limit because of the fact that she is the mascot of the Troop. Mascots, you know, are always admitted, for most of them are cats and dogs and rabbits and birds — and they aren't supposed to know what's going on. But Mabel, you may be sure, knows everything that is taking place."

As Captain Horton finished, the girls all laughed and clapped their hands.

"Is it really true?" "Did you see her?" "Was she cunning?" "Tell us more about it!" were some of the clamored questions.

"Yes, it is quite true, although it does sound

like a fairy story. And I not only saw but heard her. Girls, I wish you could have heard that darling baby voice reciting our promise! She was so sweetly solemn about it. 'On my honor I will *twy,*' she said, and all the rest of it. Mrs. Pain says she does everything as nearly right as she can, because she is so proud of being a Girl Scout. And cunning? Indeed she was! Just imagine a funny, dimply, blonde Kewpie dressed in Scout uniform, and there you will have little Mabel Pain. I wish some of you could have seen her salute; it would have been a lesson to you.

"I can't help thinking, girls, that the case of little Mabel is just an instance of the far-reaching effects of a kindly act. I don't know which girl first thought of that circulating baby, but that doesn't matter. Little Mabel, just one of dozens of tiny tots in the asylum, was destined to grow up merely one of many in the cold white dormitories, tended by faithful attendants and nurses too busy and full of care to love or mother their charges. Now, through the action of the Scouts, she has a tender mother and a proud and loving father, and will no doubt grow up to be a fine woman.

"I wish we could all do something as fine to help carry on. I want you to be on the look-out every day of your lives for a chance. And when an opportunity presents itself to you, seize it as a positive gift from heaven. A gift not to the person whom you are about to benefit, but a gift to *you.*"

"Well, shall we have a circulating baby?" asked Jane.

"Not necessarily," laughed the Captain. "There are countless ways in which you can help the old world on."

"But a baby must be such fun!"

There was a groan from two or three girls as they heard Jane speak, and one black-eyed gypsy remarked bitterly that *she* had a baby sister that they could circulate at any time, as far as she cared. Jane laughed.

"That is the way she talks, Captain," she said, "but when that baby was sick last winter Letty nearly went crazy."

Letty blushed. "*That* is different!" she said.

"Of course!" answered the Captain. "Well, it is time for each of you to think up some plan of kindness for vacation time."

"What would you advise?" asked Estella, wriggling.

"I do not advise at all," said the Captain. "I want you to do your own planning because I want the credit to be all yours. I am sure everyone of you knows some invalid, some poor child, some old person, or some very poor sad or troubled neighbor who needs you. Keep your eyes open, my dears, and listen carefully. There will be a hand beckoning or a voice calling sooner or later. And if you should miss the summons, you would always be sorry."

"When is Mabel Brewster going to bring you her report?" asked Jane.

"She is simply seeing how selfish she can be, isn't she, Captain?" asked Estella.

"Not quite that," said the Captain, a sober look stealing over her pretty face. "Mabel was dissatisfied with her life and had ambitions that did not seem to be just what a girl should strive for, so her mother and I thought it would be a good thing for Mabel, as well as for all of us, to allow her to try her theories out and tell us the result."

"Well, *I* think she is *perfectly miserable*," announced Jane bluntly. "I don't think she likes it a *bit!* How she stands it at all I don't see. And do you know, Captain, my brother says Frank sleeps every night on that little hard settee outside her door because he is afraid someone might try to get in; and as soon as school is out, he hangs around the *Times-Leader* office to walk home with her. She doesn't know it, of course, and I suppose if she did she would be mad, but if I thought *my* brother was a perfect angel like that I would feel so proud!"

"Why, what a dear he is!" said the Captain, the tears starting to her eyes.

"*She* doesn't deserve him!" said Jane.

CHAPTER X

Claire and Rosanna lingered after the meeting, talking with the Captain and Mrs. Horton, but presently Colonel Maslin came for them, and they said good-night and went away, Rosanna feeling as though she was doing something quite out of the way and rather dreadful in going off with another girl at that time of night. It must have been at least nine!

The two girls sat with the Colonel while he ate the lunch set before him by the Chinaman — a cracker and a glass of buttermilk it was — and then they said good-night and went laughing upstairs to Claire's sitting-room. In the pretty bedroom Rosanna found her clothes laid out neatly and the two took off their trim Scout uniforms and slipped into comfy kimonos.

Rosanna found that when Claire was not brooding, she was as gay and bright as any girl, and happiness transformed her face into a beautiful, glowing countenance that made Rosanna happy just to look at it.

"I wish you always felt like this," she said after a funny story of Claire's had sent her into gales of laughter.

"Like what?" demanded Claire quickly.

Rosanna was sorry that she had spoken. "Why, so jolly and merry," she said.

The cloud settled over Claire's face again.

"Perhaps I should not have said that, dear Claire," continued Rosanna gently, "but you don't know just how you *do* look a good deal of the time."

Claire shot a quick glance at her, and then looked away. "How do I look?" she asked abruptly. "I thought I looked like most every girl."

"Well, you don't," said Rosanna. She studied the beautiful, unhappy face of her friend, finding trouble in choosing her words. "It is hard for me to tell you just how you look, only it hurts me when I see it."

"Try to tell me," urged Claire as though the subject interested her deeply.

Rosanna floundered on.

"I don't know just how to explain to you, but you seem to be listening to something that I cannot hear, and way down deep in the bottom of your eyes there is a horror."

As Rosanna spoke, looking full at Claire, she trembled to see the horror leap from the depths of those jade green eyes and blaze out.

"Why, what is it? What can it be?" she stammered, clasping Claire in her warm arms. "Oh, dear Claire, there *is* something that frightens you! Tell me what it is. Does your father know? Oh, Claire, we are both Scouts; let me help you!"

For a long moment Claire seemed not to breathe. She did not move. Then with a gasping sigh, she gently unclasped Rosanna's arms and stood up. She commenced slowly to unbraid her red hair. She did not speak, and in silence Rosanna watched the gleaming, shining masses, released from their prim daytime fashion, fall like a royal garment around Claire's shoulders. Far below her waist hung the rippling locks. Claire inclined her head as though she wished to hide herself and her troubles beneath that veil. Then suddenly, proudly she flung up her head and looked straight at Rosanna with cold, level eyes.

"No one can help me," she said quietly. "I will not deny that there *is* something that troubles me, but that is all that I can tell you. I am sorry I have let you see this much. I could tell you if I were any other girl, but I cannot."

"I only want to help you, dear Claire," said Rosanna. "I hope that you feel as though you can trust me."

"Indeed I do," protested Claire, her eyes filling with tears. "I never have trusted *any* girl so much."

"Then that is all right," said Rosanna, with her sweet smile. "I just want you to promise me one thing and that is that if ever you feel as though you wanted to tell anyone, or if you feel as though anyone could help you, I want you to come to me."

"I will indeed promise that," said Claire, "but I do not think that that time will ever come. I *want* to tell you, but I cannot. And no one on earth can help me."

"I don't believe I would say that, Claire," said Rosanna musingly. "You never *can* tell just who can help you until the time comes when you need help, and then there it is, just as though you had called for it."

"I shall not call," smiled Claire stubbornly. "And please, Rosanna, let us talk of other things."

Rosanna brightly changed the conversation.

"What I am crazy to talk about is, whatever is it you are putting on?"

"This?" asked Claire, holding out a fold of the gorgeous embroidered garment she had slipped on. "It is a Mandarin coat; a real one. A real Mandarin gave it to me. I was quite a little girl. It was while daddy was stationed in China, and he and mother had a great many friends among the really high-class Chinese.

"When we came away, the Mandarin sent a box by a half-dozen bearers. It was a sort of chest with trays. There was a wonderful robe for mother made of silk as shimmery and delicate as a cobweb. It is crusted with gold embroidery and there are tiny shoes to match. Then there was a set of real jade — hair ornaments, a necklace, pins, and this ring."

"I have noticed it," said Rosanna. "It is too

lovely! And it is lovely of your mother to let you wear it until she gets well."

Claire was silent for a moment, then went on: "In a lower tray there was this robe for me, and dozens of the most wonderful toys and playthings such as the royal children in China have, and which we over here never see. Everything but this coat is packed away. Dad says the toys are most of them really museum pieces, they are so beautiful and so rare."

"You ought to save them for your children," said Rosanna.

"When I grow up I shall give them to the Institute in Washington," Claire said with a frown. "That is the place for them."

Rosanna shook her head. "You are more generous than I could be," she laughed. "What else was there in the chest?"

"Something queer; as queer as China itself," said Claire. "All wrapped up in my Mandarin coat was a package with my name written on it. We opened the wrapper and found a little case or casket sealed up tight with wax and bearing the impression of the Mandarin's signet ring. There is an inscription on the box. Chinese, of course, but daddy could read it. It said, 'Some far day, one will give you a gift beyond all price. Give them, in return, this casket as a token of your gratitude and mine.'"

"What was in it?" asked Rosanna breathlessly.

"Why, we don't know," said Claire. "It was sealed, as I said, and I must not break it, of course. I suppose the curious thing will go to the museum, too, because no one will give me a gift 'beyond price.'"

"Oh, Claire, *don't* be so unbelieving! You don't know what might happen," cried Rosanna. "I never heard anything so exciting and so mysterious! What do you suppose is in the box?"

"I can't guess," said Claire. "I shook it, but nothing rattled. It is in a safe deposit vault. Perhaps it is just the box, because that is gold and perfectly beautiful."

"How large is it?" asked Rosanna.

"About like that," said Claire, measuring off a space the size of a commercial envelope.

"Well, I think I never heard anything so mysterious and exciting. I should think you would just go around waiting to have someone give you some wonderful present just so you could have the fun of giving them the box so you could see what is inside."

"Dad says there is a catch about it somewhere, that people like ourselves do not go around giving presents beyond price and that it is exactly like a Chinaman to do something like that. The box, I mean. All sorts of queer things happen in China."

"Tell me some more about what you did over there," begged Rosanna. "I suppose we ought to

go to bed, but I am so excited that I don't feel as though I could ever sleep again."

So, curling up in a big chair, Claire told Rosanna stories of the strange, mysterious East. Rosanna, thinking how very, very soon she too would see that strange side of the world, sat shivering with delight. Claire talked on and on. She was a good story-teller and everything was as clear and real as though they were wandering hand and hand down those strange and ancient ways.

Then Claire skipped lightly out of China into Honolulu, and thrilled Rosanna with pictures of that fairy island of Hawaii. Rosanna forgot China, forgot the mysterious box as though they had been wiped quite neatly out of her mind.

"Oh, I'm CRAZY to go there!" she cried finally. "It must be *too* lovely!"

"It is," declared Claire, and started off on a description of the wonderful bathing at Wakiki, when:

"Well, well, what's this?" rumbled in the door.

Both girls shrieked and jumped and stared wildly at Colonel Maslin, standing in the doorway.

"And I told the little Captain that I would take good care of her girl if she could come over here to visit Claire," he said, shaking his head. "I don't see how I am going to explain this. Of course, I will have to 'fess up and what she won't do to me —"

"She won't mind for once," said Rosanna. "It will be grandmother who will mind. She always minds dreadfully when I stay up late."

"And I am awfully afraid of your grandmother," declared Colonel Maslin.

"I will protect you," Rosanna promised, laughing.

"You will both protect me by hopping into bed this minute," said the Colonel. "In exactly two minutes I will return and put out the light, and I want to see both girls with their eyes tight shut and fast asleep." He turned and left the room and when he entered again the red head and the black were snuggled down, each in her soft pillow, and two pairs of eyes were tight shut, nor did they open when he dropped a light kiss on each round cheek and tiptoed out.

Rosanna fell into a restless sleep, filled with fantastic visions and presently she awoke. For a little she could not place herself. The feeling of a strange bed confused her. Then she heard a queer muffled sound, and sat up quietly. It did not come from the twin bed beside her own. She reached cautiously over and touched the spread. Claire was not lying there. The muffled sobs were farther away. Rosanna's eyes grew accustomed to the darkness and she could make out a blur of white lying near the window on the dark rug. Claire was lying there on the rug, and Claire was crying; crying as though her heart was broken. Rosanna's

firm little jaw set itself still more firmly. She slid from her bed and ran across the room. As she approached the sorrowing girl she breathed softly:

"Claire, dear, dear Claire, I cannot stand it! You need not tell me why you are so sad if you do not want to, but you must, *must* let me love you and comfort you."

The touch of Rosanna's tender arms, the loving kiss, and her heartfelt words seemed to break down Claire's icy reserve. To Rosanna's surprise and relief, she turned, wound her arms around Rosanna's neck, and whispered brokenly:

"Oh, Rosanna, I *will* tell you! I *must* tell someone or I will die!"

"Of course, you must tell me," soothed Rosanna. "Come away from this cold place first."

"No, no! I want to lie right here!" cried Claire.

"Why, of course you don't, dear," said Rosanna. "Please! Make believe I am your really truly sister tonight, as well as your Scout sister, and let's get into my bed and you can cuddle close and tell me all about it."

Claire commenced to sob again, but Rosanna tenderly coaxed her into bed and clasped her tight.

Claire did not speak; she lay in Rosanna's arms sobbing as though her heart were broken.

Rosanna did not speak, and at last Claire controlled herself.

"I was sure you were sound asleep," she said, "or I would have gone down into the study, but

I hate to go around the house in the night. It frightens me."

"I should think it would," said Rosanna, staring into the dark and hugging Claire closer.

"But I get to thinking and I can't sleep. I suppose that is why I am so much paler than most of the girls. I am awake so much, because I am too unhappy to sleep."

"But that is all wrong," said Rosanna. "Why are you so unhappy, Claire?"

"Can't you guess, Rosanna?"

"Is it your mother?" asked Rosanna.

Claire shivered violently. "Yes," she breathed.

"Oh, Claire!" said Rosanna, her own tears wetting Claire's forehead. "Oh, Claire, is it as bad as that? Is your mother so *dreadfully* ill? I thought she just had nervous prostration or something like that. That is what most people have, isn't it? I am so sorry! So dreadfully sorry! Perhaps there is a mistake. Sometimes doctors think people are awfully sick and going to — going to die, and then they get well as ever."

Claire laughed a sudden, jangling, harsh laugh that frightened Rosanna more than her sobs. She turned her lips close to Rosanna's ear, as though she hated to breathe aloud the words she struggled to utter.

"Mother is not going to die," she said finally. "She is insane!"

CHAPTER XI

Rosanna gave a little cry of sympathy and pain, but she did not speak and Rosanna simply held her close and patted her back, whispering, "There, there!" over and over until at last the cries subsided, and Claire, spent and tired, lay quite still.

"Are they *sure* they can't cure her?" Rosanna whispered finally.

"There is no hope," said Claire. "She seems to get worse all the time. She scarcely knows daddy now, and doesn't seem to care whether he comes to see her or not. For a long time she wanted to see him."

"Did she know what the matter was?" asked Rosanna.

"No, not that we know, only she is so sad, when she is herself, that daddy thinks she knows."

"Oh, I do feel *sure* that she will get well!" said Rosanna.

Claire sadly shook her head.

"There is no hope," she repeated. "We have had doctor after doctor, all the big specialists, and they can't do a *thing*. And oh, Rosanna, she was *so* pretty and so bright! We were *so* happy!"

"How did you find out about it?"

"She commenced to have headaches," said Claire.

then added haltingly, as though she could not bear to tell even Rosanna about it, "and she grew so angry about everything: awfully angry, so daddy was afraid she might hurt me. She did once or twice, but I never told. She just hit me with things, you know. Then the doctors said she must go away, my pretty, pretty, loving mother, who used to love me so! Why, she was *never* happy for a single minute unless daddy or I was with her. And she used to be so full of fun and tricks, just like a little girl. And oh, Rosanna, now I have to think of my mother in a sanitarium, with just nurses to look after her. Daddy's heart has broken and so has mine. And, Rosanna, that is not all. I am going insane, too."

After a stupefied pause, Rosanna bounced violently up on her knees and shook Claire roughly.

"Claire, *what* a thing to say!" she exclaimed. "How *can* you say anything like that? Never, NEVER say it again."

"It doesn't matter whether I say it or not," said Claire, "it is going to happen, and it will kill daddy. Why, Rosanna, I have the most awful tempers you ever dreamed of and when they come on I don't know or care what I do or say. I feel too awfully afterwards, of course, but I go into a sort of frenzy and can't control myself. I hate to tell you all this, Rosanna; you will not understand it perhaps, but if I do not tell someone, I shall die! I cannot bear it alone any longer. We have kept

it so quiet about mother. No one in the Army suspects. We always say she has had a nervous breakdown."

"Well, I can never tell you, Claire, dear, how dreadfully I feel about it all," said Rosanna, kissing her friend's wet cheek. "But I am glad you have told me. We will bear it together, and I am sure that will make it easier for you. And as far as you are concerned, I am perfectly sure that is nothing at all but imagination." She slid down and once more took Claire's head on her loving little arm. "You are so tired, dear," she said. "Let us rest awhile, and then when you feel better, I will tell you about *my* mother and father. Wouldn't you like to hear about them?"

"I would love to," said Claire. "Oh, it *is* easier to bear now that you are sharing it with me," she murmured.

"Rest," said Rosanna softly, catching a sleepy note in the tired voice. Then suddenly, "Where is your mother now?"

"At a place called Laurel Hill Home, just outside of Cincinnati," said Claire, and in two minutes her regular heavy breathing told Rosanna that she was sound asleep.

And in about two minutes more two girls, cuddled close, were dreamlessly sleeping.

When they woke the following morning they found the blinds drawn so there was a soft twilight in the room, but on the pavement outside they

could hear the shuffle and patter of many feet going to the Christian Science temple near by.

Claire rubbed her sleepy eyes, then leaned over and patted Rosanna.

"Will you ever forgive me for keeping you awake all night?" she asked wistfully. "What a *selfish* girl I am!"

"Indeed, you are not!" declared Rosanna. "Goodness me, what time is it? Do I hear people going past to church?"

"You do," laughed Claire.

"Well, I was sure we put up all the shades before we went to bed."

"We did, but daddy closed them before he went up to Camp. He always does that if he thinks I had better sleep late, and leaves a letter for me. He is *so* good, Rosanna. I wish he had a nicer child."

"Well, I suppose one can be almost any way one *wants* to me," replied Rosanna. "I was so bad and ungrateful once that I'm sure anyone who wants to try can change themselves. I am not so very good yet, but I can't help knowing that I am much nicer than I was." Both girls laughed.

"Yes, I am sure you are very nice, indeed," said Claire. "I could never be as nice as you are."

"Don't make fun of me," pouted Rosanna, her eyes twinkling. "Let's hurry up and go to church. The Christian Science Church has service an hour

sooner than the others, so we will have time if we rush."

They *did* rush, and a brisk walk brought them to the arched door of the old ivy-covered church just as the long line of choir boys walked slowly down the aisle.

Rosanna heard nothing of the very excellent sermon. It was the first time she had had to think quietly of what Claire had told her in the night. She went over it all carefully, her tender heart aching for the poor girl beside her. If there was only *something* she could do. She wanted to help. But what could anyone do in a case like this? If all those wise doctors said that there was no help for poor Mrs. Maslin, surely there was nothing for a poor little Girl Scout to do.

Finally she closed her eyes tight, very tight, and a fervent little prayer for guidance squeezed itself out of her heavy heart.

"Please, *please* show me what to do!" she begged, and at once, right then, the rector spoke loudly:

"What have *you* done?" he demanded. "Have *you* made an honest effort to solve your problems, to unravel your tangles, or have you supinely left it all with your Creator? Believe me, you must make an honest effort yourself. Ask yourself if you are really trying to do what there is for you to do."

Rosanna was so startled that she grew red and sat up very straight. Then she reflected that it

was a good thing that she had heard that much of the sermon. She had prayed for help, and she must be awake and ready to receive it when it came. Moreover, she herself must look for a way.

All the way back to Claire's she pondered, and was so silent during dinner that the Colonel accused her of being sleepy. After dinner the Colonel said he had some letters to write, but later he would take them to the Country Club for supper. So the girls decided to write also, and settled themselves on either side of the big library table.

Claire was soon busy writing to a schoolmate in Honolulu, but Rosanna dawdled over her paper.

Then all at once it came to her. Bright as day, clear as a bell, she knew what she wanted to do and how to do it. Her thoughts flew back to the time when Doctor Branshaw, over there in Cincinnati, had operated on poor little lame Gwenny and had made her well; actually well. She wondered if people with hurt or lame brains could not be operated on. And that was another thought. Had Mrs. Maslin ever been hurt, or had she just — well, just gone so naturally?

"I have been thinking about your mother," she said suddenly, interrupting Claire. "What do you suppose made her so — I mean the way she is? Did she ever get hurt?"

"Not enough to harm her," said Claire, starting. "No, never! She had an awful fall with her horse once, that stunned her for half an hour. I was

with her and I was frightened almost to death. But she was all right again in no time, and it did not hurt her at all except where she bumped her head. She would not let me tell daddy because he always worried over things. Her hair was so thick that it didn't cut her, but it was a hard blow and she had an awful headache for days, but that was all. No, she was never hurt."

"I wondered," said Rosanna, and commenced to write. And this is what she said:

"*Dear Doctor Branshaw:*

"You said to the Girl Scouts of our Troop once that we must be sure to tell you if ever we found another Gwenny. Do you remember? And we all promised that we would.

"Well, I have. But this girl is not a bit like Gwenny. She is beautiful, and has loads and loads of money, and is perfectly well. But oh, Doctor Branshaw, she is really sadder than Gwenny, because she has no brothers and sisters, but a lovely father whose heart is broken and her mother is insane. The doctors say she will never be any better, but just go on getting worse and worse always. But I prayed about it, and I know that you can cure her. You would be glad to if you could see this girl. Her name is Claire Maslin, and her father is a colonel in the Army and is stationed here. She is not like a girl at all except once in awhile when she forgets, and she thinks she is going to go insane too, when she gets older. She feels it coming on, but I am sure she is mistaken. But every girl needs her mother, don't you think so? And so please cure Mrs. Maslin. She is at a place right there in Cincinnati, and the address is on the slip of paper pinned to the top sheet.

"I know that you are very busy, but it will make you feel as good as you did about Gwenny when you have cured Claire's

mother, because I feel as though she needs her very, very badly. Although Colonel Maslin is truly lovely, of course he can't really be a mother.

"So *please* do this, Doctor, as soon as you can possibly get the time.

"Your loving little friend,

"ROSANNA HORTON.

"P. S. Claire is a Girl Scout."

Rosanna sealed the letter and addressed it and leaned back with a sigh of relief. Claire glanced up, and seeing that Rosanna was through her writing said slowly:

"Rosanna, if you were with me, I don't believe I would ever have another of those awful spells. I feel so different when I am with you. You make me feel so brave and quiet. Dad says he wants me to go to the seashore this summer and I want you to come with me."

It was on Rosanna's lips to say that she was going on a wonderful voyage across the sea, but she remembered her promise to Uncle Bob and stammered, "Oh, that would be lovely, Claire, but I would have to see grandmother about it."

"Oh, *make* them say yes!" begged Claire. "I *need* you, Rosanna. I truly do! Of course, if there is something else you want to do, it is all right, but I do want you awfully, dear Rosanna, and I am sure we will have a good time."

"I know it would be perfectly splendid," said Rosanna, wondering why everything had to happen

at the same time. "I will ask about it tonight, and then I can tell you tomorrow."

"Good," said Claire. "And I will go to dad's study right now and tell him that he must beg your family to let you come."

"All right," laughed Rosanna, "and while you are telling him, I will go and change my dress."

She ran lightly upstairs and Claire, humming a little tune in her new happiness, skipped to her father's private office and opened the door. What she saw stopped her like a blow. Her father sat at his desk, his head buried in his arms. His wife's picture was clasped in one hand. His shoulders shook with sobs.

Rosanna looked up with a smile as Claire entered, but Claire did not return it. She closed the door carefully, almost as though she thought it might break, then leaning against it, stood looking into space.

"What did he say?" asked Rosanna.

"Nothing; that is, I didn't speak to him," said Claire. Then with a rush, "Rosanna, I can't invite you to the seashore after all. I shall not go. I shall stay with dad. He is down there with mother's picture in his hand, *crying*. I never saw him cry, Rosanna. It's awful! He is always so brave. I never saw him cry. I cry enough, but somehow it's awful for *dad* to cry. You see I can't leave him, can I, Rosanna?"

"No," said Rosanna, "you can't leave him."

"He is always so cheerful and bright that I never thought about his feeling it like this. Oh, how selfish I have been! I do not deserve to be a Girl Scout at all. I came to the place in the Manual the other day, where it tells about loyalty to parents, and I wouldn't read it at all, I was so sorry for myself. I just don't deserve my badge. I shall tell the Captain to deprive me of it."

"Nothing of the sort!" said Rosanna firmly. "You will simply do differently, that's all."

"Indeed I will! My darling daddy! I didn't know what to do, Rosanna, so I just came out. I shall not let him know a thing, but I shall tell him that I mean to stay here with him. And I can be near you, Rosanna, and you will help me."

The two girls looked at each other. Claire's eyes were pleading and wistful, her mouth trembled and she breathed as though she had been running. Rosanna stared until Claire went out in a sort of a mist like the fade-outs in the movies. And in her place Rosanna saw the tumbling waters and the white sails of all the ports of the world! And her heart went down, and down, and down! Then she saw Claire again, and she was saying, "You *will* help me, won't you, Rosanna?"

And Rosanna's heart came up, and up, and up. It was filled with splendid sacrifice and high resolve, and loving kindness; but she only said, "Yes, Claire, I will be here, and I will help you."

Rosanna had made her choice.

CHAPTER XII

When Rosanna went home that night after supper at the Club and a long drive up the River Road, she realized for the first time just how great a sacrifice she *had* made. All the Ports of the World to see, and now she might never, never see them! A thousand things might come up to prevent another such a journey.

She fairly ached as she thought it over. And she wondered how the family would receive the news she was about to spring.

To her surprise very little was said. Her grandmother immediately wanted to know if this was more Girl Scout business, and when Rosanna said yes, she simply nodded as though that answer settled the question in a perfectly satisfactory way. Cita said, "Oh, Rosanna!" looked as though she was going to say something also, and stopped. Uncle Robert said, "Well, I'll be swamfoozled!" Being "swamfoozled" had a strange effect. Uncle Robert picked Rosanna up bodily, hugged her very hard, kissed her very hard, and then sat her down hard in a chair. Then everyone just sat and thought.

"That Claire kid is sure having a hard row to hoe," said Uncle Bob finally.

"Worse than death," said Mrs. Horton, thinking of young Mrs. Maslin.

"The Colonel told me about it," said Cita.

Uncle Robert heaved a sigh. "Well, sweetness, I believe *absolutely* in you Girl Scouts living up to your promises exactly as it seems right to you. If you feel that staying with this girl is of enough importance to lose out on this trip overseas, I have confidence enough in your judgment to know that it *is* important. And if it is a case of helping that poor kid through a pretty black place in her life, there is nothing else for you to do. I reckon it will come out right in the end for both of you. And I am proud of you, Rosanna."

With a funny formality he bowed and shook her hand. Rosanna somehow felt well repaid. Uncle Robert never did anything like that unless he was very, very much in earnest.

Very little else was talked about for the next three days and then other things came up to crowd it out of the front of Rosanna's mind.

For one thing, Uncle Bob found that he could not go as soon as he thought, and that put off the packing, so Rosanna had time to get used to the idea of being left behind without all the misery of seeing the trunks filled. Claire, who did not know what a sacrifice Rosanna was about to make for her, made happy plans and dozens of them. Colonel

Maslin, surprised at Claire's sudden refusal to plan for the seashore trip, insisted on a reason and was made very happy by the knowledge that his cold and moody daughter really loved her unhappy father more than she did her own pleasure.

Late in the afternoon of the third day Rosanna was called to the telephone. It was a long distance call from Cincinnati and for a full five minutes Dr. Branshaw talked to her.

Rosanna was very thoughtful when she hung up the receiver and went down to ask Claire who was sitting in the rose arbor, if she was going to drive to camp after her father. Claire was, and together they started. On a sunny corner, up by the Reform School, they saw Mabel Brewster standing.

She looked warm and dejected, and Claire stopped the car and asked the young newspaper woman if she cared to ride with them.

Mabel accepted with very little enthusiasm, remarking as she did so that she had to be back at the office at a quarter before six.

When they reached Camp, Rosanna slipped her hand in Claire's and said coaxingly, "Claire dear, I want to see your father all by himself. Will you mind?"

"A secret?" asked Claire, laughing. "Dear me, how exciting this is! Shall I ever know what it is about?"

"If you are a good girl perhaps," said Rosanna, skipping toward the Colonel's office. When she

found herself seated facing Colonel Maslin across the big flat-top desk, her courage failed her for a minute, then she plunged into the story.

"I don't know if I have done right or not, Colonel Maslin," she said. "All I thought was that Claire is a Girl Scout and we are bound to help each other. And I did not stop to ask anyone's advice."

"What can it be?" said Colonel Maslin, smiling.

"Claire told me about her mother," resumed Rosanna. "And what she is afraid of, you know; and I felt as though there must be *some* way to help. So Sunday morning, you know, we went to church; and I just sat there and thought and *thought,* and then I prayed. I did not hear a word of the sermon, but right away Doctor Ford just shouted at me, and asked if *I* had been trying to *do* anything. And that I had better had if I expected God to help me. But even then I didn't know what to do. When we were writing letters after dinner, it all came to me. You know the little Gwenny I told you about, and the doctor in Cincinnati who made her perfectly well?

"Well, I wrote him a letter right then. I asked him to please cure Mrs. Maslin as soon as he had time, because Claire is a Girl Scout. This afternoon Doctor Bransbaw telephoned me. He says he can't go ahead and take care of Mrs. Maslin unless you tell him to. He can't have anything to do with it at all unless you say so. But he knows the doctor where Mrs. Maslin is, so he went up to

See her and he asked me if I knew how long since Mrs. Maslin fell."

"She never had a fall," said Colonel Maslin positively.

"Yes, she fell from her horse about six years ago," said Rosanna. "It gave her fearful headaches."

"How do you know all this?" demanded the Colonel.

"Claire told me. She was with her mother but she promised not to tell on account of worrying you, and it didn't amount to anything."

"Good heavens!" muttered Colonel Maslin. "Go on!"

"I told the Doctor about that, and he said if you wanted to consult him, to telephone him."

Instead of answering, the Colonel took down the telephone receiver and inquired about trains to Cincinnati. Then he rose, came to Rosanna, and very solemnly kissed her on the forehead.

"I shall take the nine o'clock train for Cincinnati to see this doctor of yours, and I think it would be well if we kept our hopes to ourselves for awhile. It would not be kind to raise Claire's hopes again."

"That is what I thought," answered Rosanna. "She will just think our talk is something about vacation. Oh, Colonel, I am so *sure* that Doctor Branshaw will cure Mrs. Maslin! If you had seen Gwenny, you would feel just as I do, I am sure."

"Claire's mother is ill in a different way, my dear," said Colonel Maslin sadly, "but we will hope for the best. As soon as I return from Cincinnati, I will tell you just what the doctor says. I would try anything in the world — but we must go now."

Together they went out to the car, Colonel Maslin looking so thoughtful that Claire declared that she didn't see how they could either of them bear to leave her out of the secret. They drove down to the *Times-Leader* office with Mabel, and on the way home Claire said that Mabel was awfully excited. She had written a poem and had left a copy of it on the Editor's desk.

"She says," said Claire, "that she knows it is good, and if the *Times-Leader* pays a dollar a line, the way lots of the magazines do, she will get a hundred dollars for it."

"Great Scott!" said Colonel Maslin. "How long is it?"

"Twenty stanzas, five lines each," said Claire. "She made them four lines each at first, then she put on a sort of refrain, on account of the extra dollar."

"A very businesslike young poet," said Colonel Maslin. "I would like to see a sample of that poem. I am not sure that I would have time to read twenty stanzas, but I could get a good idea of it from eight or ten verses, no doubt."

"Well, we will see it all, if it is published," said Claire. "Mabel says she will not allow them to

print it unless they pay her price for it. She says good work is always worth its price."

Colonel Maslin shook his head solemnly. "That beats all!" he said. "I suppose by now she has her check and is wondering what to do with the one hundred dollars."

Nothing like that was happening to Mabel!

Since the fatal Sunday when she had refused to attend the office boy's picnic, he had regarded her with such scorn that it was apparent to the whole force. Mabel's small, shy overtures of friendship were simply scoffed at. He did not leave her alone; he put himself in her way for the pleasure it gave him to stalk off again, with a grin on his face and his snub nose in the air. Reams of society notes which Mabel had written, only to have them discarded by Miss Gere, he picked out of the waste baskets and laid on her desk, saying loudly, "I think these are yours, Miss Brewster."

When she went out at night, she found him hanging affectionately over Frank's shoulder, but at the sight of her he turned and strutted off.

Mabel was sure that the City Editor was watching her more than he had at first, but her conceit took that as a compliment. Miss Gere's manner had not changed, but Mabel heard her sigh often.

Miss Gere *was* sighing over Mabel, but Mabel did not guess that. She would not have believed such a thing possible.

She did not like the manner of the office boy, how-

ever. It hurt her pride. When she reached the door of the office, it was deserted excepting for Jimmie who, with his face pressed close to the dingy window pane, was watching something in the street below. In a corner near the door a temporary cloakroom had been made by running up two flimsy partitions. They were only six feet high but there was a place to fix one's hair at a little glass and keep coats and hats out of the dust. Mabel tiptoed quickly into this haven and decided to wait there until someone else came in. She sat down noiselessly on the rickety chair but immediately she heard steps and voices. Before she could rise she heard a sentence that froze her. She forgot that listening is a despicable trick. She just sat transfixed! The voice was that of the Editor and he was evidently talking to Miss Gere about her, because he said:

"Why, today I found a poem on my desk, with a letter. Why, Miss Gere, that kid ought to be home under her mother's wing, and here she is trying to be sophisticated, and writing drivel that would shame a child six years old!"

Miss Gere laughed.

"Don't be so severe, Chief," she begged.

"I am *not* severe!" he said savagely. "You are not fair with her. If that girl has no more feeling for her mother and no appreciation of her brother — Why, do you know that youngster sleeps outside her door every night to take care of her, for fear

someone might frighten her? She *needs* a good scare *I* should say. Sleeps there on the floor!"

Miss Gere interrupted. "Not quite as bad as that," she said. "I happen to know that there is a settee there."

"Well, what's a settee for a growing boy?" growled the Chief. "Well, if she has no affection, no gratitude and evidently no natural love for her own people and only an *ordinary* brain, what's the use of bothering with her? *I* don't want to see her hanging around. I know she is under your charge, Miss Gere, but I wish you would let me fire her. I want to tell her to go home and ask her mother to forgive her, and see if she can get a little sense into her head, and try to live and act according to her years. Where in time did she get such notions?"

"She reads a good deal, I believe," said Miss Gere. "Cheap magazines and silly novels."

"Well, fire her! As far as I go, the experiment is over!" He walked over to his desk. "When she comes in tomorrow, send her to me. I will at least have the comfort of telling her what I think of this poem. You will hear the truth about your imagined talents for once, Miss Mabel Brewster." He slammed down the top of his desk and stalked out without saying good-night.

Jesse, quite pale under his freckles, came over to Miss Gere.

"My land!" he said. "What ails the Old Man?

Somebody on the *Journal* must 'a' got a scoop away from him. Say, he gave it to her good, didn't he?"

"She deserves all that, Jesse, but he was rather wild about it."

"*I* don't think she deserves such a call," said Jesse. "And I don't say that because she ever fell for me, because she didn't. She hates me worse'n a stingin' adder, but I bet she's a darned nice girl if it wasn't for this foolishness about a career. She's a Girl Scout, too, and has a whole sleeve full of Merit badges. You can't fake those, you know. She's due to get a fierce bump, and if she doesn't get it here, she will the next place. Gee, I'm glad I'm not her!"

"She *is* a little goose," said Miss Gere, who had had a hard day and was tired out. "And she has the sweetest mother in the world."

"Don't I know? I'll say I do!" said Jesse fervently. "She chaperoned a picnic last week for us, and before the picnic was half over all of us fellows had forgotten the picnic, and the girls and everything, and were sitting around Mrs. Brewster, listening to her talk. I'll say she is all right! And Miss M. Brewster *wouldn't go!* Well, I am sorry for her. She must have a good streak somewhere. Are you going now, Miss Gere?"

They went out together, and Mabel could hear their voices echoing along the empty corridor. She was shaking. Somehow she got out of the building and turned toward Third Street. Frank was not in

sight, having been told by Jesse that his sister was not in the office. She hoped fervently that she would not meet him. As she passed a grocery she remembered that her larder was empty, but she did not want to eat ever again. She wanted to get into her room and shut the door on the whole world.

Her world had tumbled. As she made her way blindly past the closed stores and around by the trolley terminal she felt a touch on her arm. She turned, and a young rowdy fell into step with her, and pushed his battered hat rakishly over his eyes.

"Hello, girlie!" he muttered in a hoarse voice. "Seen you comin' an' made up my mind you hadn't no date. I like your looks. How's a sody?" He took Mabel by the elbow.

She wrenched herself free, and with a gasp ran fleetingly up the street.

So this was what Frank had been saving her from! Such creatures as the one who had just spoken to her! She looked behind, and saw to her relief that the fellow was not trying to follow her. She choked down her sobs and hurried on. When she reached the apartment she locked the door behind her with trembling fingers, and for the first time looked under beds and in clothes-presses; everywhere where an intruder might lurk. But she was quite alone.

CHAPTER XIII

Mabel Brewster may live to be a very old woman but she will never like to look back at that one night in her life. She could not eat anything; she could not read, although a nice trashy novel invited her. She could not sleep. And it was well.

Mabel had come to a place where she was forced to balance her books. She had been so anxious to be a business woman, a professional woman, a Free Soul, that she had not looked once on the debit side of the page. And sooner or later we all must do this.

She was very, very unhappy, embarrassed and ashamed; but her mind was made up. All she longed for was light — the coming of day so that she could carry out the plans she had formulated.

She sat thinking, thinking until ten o'clock, then with a queer little smile as she noticed the time, she went to the door with caution and turned the key, and slowly, very slowly opened the door.

It was true. On the cramped, uncomfortable settee, curled up asleep, was Frank. Mabel stared. So it was true — her brother — just as they had said! For one wild moment her resolves vanished. She felt an overpowering impulse to run away, to disappear so the dear people whom she had utterly

failed would never again see her face. But it vanished as quickly as it had come.

She stepped to Frank's side and laid her hand gently on his shoulder. Instantly his arm shot out in a sweeping blow and he leaped to his feet. The doubled fist missed Mabel by a bare fraction.

"Don't hit me, dear," she said gently. "Come inside and go to bed properly. You see I know all about you at last. I can't thank you for being so good to me, but I am going to be a better sister to you, Frank."

Frank, looking rather sheepish at being caught, followed his sister into the room. He looked about it curiously. He had never been through the apartment, wishing to show by his absence that he disapproved of the whole thing. Now, however, he was embarrassed and needed a subject for conversation.

"It is not bad here," he said gruffly.

"I think it is *perfectly horrid!*" said Mabel. "If you and mother will let me, I am coming home tomorrow."

"To stay?" asked Frank incredulously.

"To stay forever and ever!" said Mabel. "It will take me that long to show you what a goose I have been, and how I mean to be different. Oh, Frank, there is *no* such thing as a person living all for herself. *Never!* I wonder if there was ever such a silly, conceited, *selfish* person in the world before."

"Well, my goodness, Mabe, I wouldn't knock my-

self like that," said Frank uncomfortably. "If that's the way you feel, why, it's all right. I know mother will be tickled to death to have you home again. She feels pretty bad about your being away. She is lonesome as the dickens for you. But she is so sweet she wouldn't let you know it."

Mabel burst into tears.

"Oh, I have been lonesome too!" she cried. "I have been perfectly miserable! Oh, Frank, I don't see what ailed me!"

"Why not pick up some of your things and go home tonight?" suggested Frank hopefully.

"No," she said. "If I am going to turn over a new leaf I will have a good many things to do tomorrow. Oh dear, it is going to be perfectly awful, but I deserve it. We had better go to bed now, Frank. There is a bed all made up in the little room next to mine. Oh, how scared I used to be here all alone!"

"I wouldn't bother to think about it," said Frank. "I bet we will have a good time after this, Sissy. We will understand each other better. And I have learned a lesson myself; and that is to stick by my mother just as close as ever I can."

"Here, too!" said Mabel. "Oh, I wish it was morning! I wish tomorrow was all over!"

"Can I help?" asked Frank, as he stooped to unlace his shoes.

"No, thank you," said Mabel grimly. "I started this thing, and I am going to finish it."

"Well, good-night then," said Frank, giving his sister a hearty hug and kiss, which Mabel returned joyfully. The days when she had turned a cold cheek to her brother or had given him a chilly peck were past forever.

Next morning, Mabel, instead of wadding her nice hair up in buns, braided it neatly in her old fashion, put on her neatest and most girlish dress, and went down to the *Times-Leader* office. All the reporters had received their assignments and had gone out. The City Editor sat at his desk inside the magic railing that Mabel had planned to pass. She caught her breath, then walked up and rested her hands on the rail. When he saw her the Editor rose. He felt as though he wanted to look as tall as he felt, when he said what he intended to say to this pert young person.

"Well, young lady," he commenced, but Mabel, nodding her head, interrupted him.

"Yes, sir, I know just what you are going to say," she said, fixing her eyes bravely on his. "I never meant to eavesdrop, but I was here in the cloakroom last evening when you said what you did to Miss Gere. About me, I mean, and my selfishness, and my bad poetry and all of everything. And it is all true. I am glad I heard you. It is perfectly true. But I have been finding out since I came in here that I don't amount to anything. And I have been so bad to my mother that perhaps she won't want me to come home at all. I am sorry you have had to

bother with me, and of course I don't deserve any wages. I just wanted you to know that I am going to go home and beg my mother to forgive me, and if she *will* let me come back, I am going to try to show her that it did pay to let me make this experiment after all."

Mabel choked, but before the dumbfounded Editor could sit down nearer Mabel's level and feel as small as he *wanted* to feel, she went on:

"I think mother will let me try again. She is that sort. And you needn't be afraid; I will truly, *truly* be a good girl, and I'm so sorry." She turned and bolted for the door and collided violently with Jesse, who had entered just behind her with a letter for the Editor. Mabel righted herself and gave the boy a jerky little nod.

"You heard what I said, didn't you?" she asked. "Well, I mean it! And I am sorry I was horrid to you. It was just because I was a conceited little prig, and you needn't speak to me again ever!"

She dodged around the boy and was out of sight.

"*Cummere!*" roared the City Editor all in one word, but Mabel ran breathlessly down the dusty stairs toward the street. She simply could not stay up there and wait for Miss Gere. She would write her a letter or go to her house. Just as she reached the bottom of the last flight she heard someone pounding down four steps at a time. It was Jesse, and when he reached her, he laid a desperate clutch on her sleeve.

"Hey, you've got to listen!" he panted. "Gosh, I won't let you go off without telling you I think you have got more grit than any girl I ever saw. No matter what you ever did to me, I'm strong for you now all right. Don't you forget that! And I want to shake hands with you if you don't mind."

He put out a grimy paw and pumped Mabel's hand vigorously up and down.

Mabel found herself unable to speak. She dragged her hand away and rushed out of the building, tears blinding her eyes but a strange warm feeling in her heart. She walked up the street thinking of Jesse; Jesse who had been so utterly scorned.

How splendid he seemed now! How generous and friendly and loyal! And when you really looked at him, he was not homely. He had freckles, of course, and his nose was snub, and his hair seemed to be all cowlicks: but the teeth that his wide grin disclosed were dazzling white, his blue eyes simply crackled they were so full of twinkles, and his hand, despite the grime, was warm and friendly. Mabel felt her heart lift a little. It looked as though she had one friend after all.

Unfortunately she had not understood the roar sent after her by the Editor. It was a pity, because that Editor was quite her ideal of everything great, and it would have comforted her to know that, as she scurried up Third Street, he was sitting hunched up in his chair, listening to Jesse's vigorous words

as he told of the look on Mabel's face and her tear-filled eyes as she ran away from him. It would have comforted Mabel indeed if some kind fairy had whispered to her that she was one day to be on terms of the greatest friendliness with that same Editor, with the privilege of entering his magic railing any time she liked. But no such thought came to comfort her and she rushed on, her feet trying to keep pace with her eagerness to reach her mother.

What she said to that dear mother, what tears they shed together, and what plans they made for a new and happy life together, any girl who has made a mistake and has owned up everything in the safe circle of her mother's arms will easily guess.

A couple of hours later Mabel and Frank were at the miserable apartment cleaning up and packing Mabel's things. Mabel was happy. She was going home. She was going to be just a *real girl* and a *good Scout*, and she felt as though she wanted to prance for joy. There was a Scout meeting that night and it was up to her to attend and make her report. And so greatly had her point of view changed and so high had her courage grown that she did not mind one bit.

It did seem as though there had never been as good a supper as that happy family sat down to enjoy. Oh, what a good supper it was! After the chilly canned meats, and olives and delicatessen cakes that Mabel had been subsisting on, to have

fluffy hot biscuit, flaky potatoes, tender asparagus, and perfectly broiled beefsteak — Mabel nearly cried with happiness. They all helped to get it, and Frank sang at the top of his voice while he set the table.

As soon as supper was over and the dishes stacked in the kitchen, Mrs. Brewster made Mabel get on her Scout uniform, and Frank walked over to the Hortons with her.

The girls were all glad to see Mabel, and there was a sort of stir of excitement as they one and all remembered that on her return to the Scout meetings Mabel was to tell them all about her experiences in the big world of labor.

Mabel was so anxious to get her story over with that she could scarcely wait for the business part of the meeting to be finished. The Captain was anxious, too. As she had had no chance to see Mabel before the meeting opened, she could not guess what Mabel intended to say, although she had an inkling that the experiment had turned out exactly as she had hoped it would.

When Mabel's chance finally came, when the Captain had given her permission to speak, and she rose from her chair and faced the roomful of girls, she found that her heart was beating heavily and her breath coming fast. But she did not hesitate.

"I reckon the first thing to tell you about my experiment in living for myself alone is that it will not work. I don't believe that anyone in the *world*

can actually live as selfishly as I tried to. A girl needs her mother every minute, and she needs whatever else she has in the line of a family.

"Well, to begin at the beginning, I had been reading a lot of silly novels, and every time I could I went to see a movie about elopements and girls who were misunderstood by their families. You see I am going to make this a real honest confession instead of just a report. If I just said that I failed, why, some of you perhaps would think you could do better than I did, and try it for yourselves. But you needn't waste your time. Only I don't believe any other Girl Scout would ever be as silly as I have been.

"Well, to begin again, I went over to an apartment that a friend of ours was leaving vacant, and there I stayed all alone. Some of you girls came to see me, but you didn't act as though you were very crazy over it and I finally learned why. Of course I know how to cook quite a few things but it was not much fun trying to fix meals for just one, and I remembered all the time how I used to grumble at home because I had to get things for Frank once in awhile. And all the while I was there in that apartment my dear brother was sleeping on a mean little settee in the hall because he was afraid I would be scared or sick." Mabel paused, and her eyes filled with tears. Then she continued:

" Mother arranged for me to take a position under Miss Gere, the Society Editor of the *Times-Leader,* I thought I was going to do wonders but I found that Miss Gere had to rewrite almost everything I turned in, and no one wanted to be interviewed by a school-girl, anyway. There was an awfully nice boy in the office. I thought I was a great deal better than he was, and I snubbed him awfully, and come to find out, he is a great friend of Frank's and I am dreadfully ashamed of the way I treated *him.* Everything went from bad to worse. I finally got so I didn't have anything for meals but cooked stuff from the delicatessens, and at that I spent everything I made. I just bought me one hat. It costs awfully to live and buy food. I don't see how grown people do it. Oh, well, I will skip a lot of details. But I was sick as I could be of my experiment, and wished myself back home a million times a day; but I was too stubborn to give in. Besides, I still thought I was a little wonder at writing. But yesterday! I was in the cloakroom, and overheard the Editor talking to Miss Gere, and oh, girls, he said the most *awful* things about me and the way I worked, and the wretched stuff I wrote, and oh, *everything!* What he thought of me for my disloyalty to my mother, trying to get out and shirk my duty just when she needs me, and everything! I don't believe he left out anything! And girls, it is all true. Every bit!

"Well, he and Miss Gere went out, and I went home and sat down and thought about everything. I never felt so small. And however small I felt, I knew it was my really true size. The size I belong. About an inch high.

"And presently I looked into the hall, and there was Frank all crunched up on the settee. I woke him up and asked him to forgive me, and I felt a little better.

"Well, this morning I went down to see the Editor, and before he had a chance to tell me what he thought of me, I hurried up and told him what I thought of myself. He looked sort of surprised. But before he could say anything, I dashed out. And when I was almost to the door downstairs, down came that boy. He had heard everything and he came all the way down to say he thought I was *brave*, and to shake hands with me. It made me feel a little better.

"I 'most ran all the way home, and I felt lonelier and littler all the way, and when I opened the door and saw my mother I just fell on her. I forgot I was going to say that my experiment had failed and that I wanted to come home. I forgot everything I had planned. When I saw how sweet she looked and how *motherly*, I just cried and cried, and all I said at all was, 'Oh, mother, *am* I your little girl? *Am* I your little girl for always?' And all she said was, 'Always and always and always, my darling!'"

Mabel's voice trailed off to a husky whisper. Her eyes were downcast as she twisted a button on her blouse, and she did not see that half the eyes were wet. But they were friendly eyes. Not a girl there but liked Mabel a thousand times better for her brave and outright confession.

"That is all," said Mabel after a pause. "Mother says it is wiped out and all past, like a fever, but I shall not forget it. I don't *want* to forget it. And I want you, every one of you, to come right out and tell me if you ever see me acting conceited or snobbish or silly, because I will *not* go back and be the old Mabel."

"Well, Mabel, you are a brick!" said Jane, springing up. "I know we are going to be the best of friends in the world. I didn't like the old Mabel a bit either!"

"I don't think there *was* any old Mabel," said the Captain quietly. "It was always this Mabel, sensible and true, but mistaken and sadly on the wrong track. And I am so proud, Mabel, to see how you have profited by this lesson."

"Thank you very much," said Mabel: then added grimly, "But new Mabel or old, she deserved it all. And I hope I never have to see that Editor again."

But she did.

CHAPTER XIV

A DAY or so after this memorable meeting of the Girl Scouts things commenced to happen so rapidly that Rosanna was fairly dizzy.

Uncle Bob's affairs straightened out and the family set off for New York, where they were to take passage for France, their first stopping place. Rosanna, with a heartache that she could not control, went over with her modest little trunk to stay with Claire. It *was* a tremendous sacrifice for the little girl to give up this marvelous journey, and all her fine generosity and tenderheartedness failed to save her a few deep pangs. But if ever a girl was repaid, it was enough to pay *anyone* to see the wordless gratitude of Claire.

When Claire found that the Hortons were going abroad and that Rosanna intended to remain with the Maslins, it was necessary to tell her something of the reason why, for of course she could not understand the common sense of Rosanna remaining with her. So Colonel Maslin explained that a new doctor was going to try the effect of an operation on her mother. Doctor Bransbaw did not want to operate until he was sure that his patient was in good con-

dition, so he insisted on waiting for awhile and to Claire this waiting would be the greatest strain of all. So much depended on the operation. Her mother, her beautiful, gay, young mother restored almost from the dead, or else . . . Claire stopped there. She did not feel herself strong enough to think of anything but her mother getting well.

The doctor and Colonel Maslin agreed that it would not do to worry Claire, and so the wistful and frightened girl was thrown more and more on the kindness of Rosanna. Claire was frightened. It dawned on her that perhaps her mother might die in this terrible operation that was coming. Rosanna did not fail her. She carried Claire out of her despairing moods by her own cheerful, hopeful presence and, thanks to her, the time passed quickly.

School ended and vacation commenced. The summer heat beat on Louisville, and even the shady byways and lanes running through the beautiful parks were breathless. Colonel Maslin begged the girls to go into the country but Claire refused to leave him.

The Troop of Girl Scouts went off for a week's camping, but as Claire would not leave her father, Rosanna decided not to go. The girls returned, sunbrowned and bubbling with funny accounts of the trip. Every evening a row of them came and sat on the Maslin porch, and told new stories.

Claire and Rosanna almost felt as though they had been present. When Jane and Estella and

Elise and Helen came, all talking at once, it was hard to figure out just what *had* happened.

But the funniest one of all was Mabel Brewster. Whether it was her experiences on the staff of the *Times-Leader* or her evident happiness in her return to her home, it was hard to say; but she had become a fine story-teller and was the life of the party. She always saw the funny side of things and could tell a joke on a girl without being bitter.

There came at last hot and stifling days when the thunderheads piled high in the west and the leaves hung sagging on the branches. The girls kept within doors in a desperate effort to keep out of the worst of the heat. At noon Colonel Maslin came in, looking troubled and worn. He sat down on a wicker chair near the girls, who were flat on the floor propped on their elbows, trying to read.

"Claire, I have just had a telephone call from the doctor," he said. "He wants to see me. Will you come? I think you had better."

"Of course, daddy!" said Claire at once. She got up. "At what time does our train go?"

"I thought we might drive over," said the Colonel. "It would be so hot on a train a day like this. Will you come too, Rosanna?"

"I would love to," answered Rosanna.

"Just tell Chang to get ready, will you, dear?" asked the Colonel of his daughter. She left the room, and they heard her calling to Chang in the distance.

"Rosanna, the time has come," said the Colonel in a voice which shook a little. "We won't tell Claire until we reach Cincinnati, but this weather is undoing all the weeks of preparation, and the doctor says the operation must take place immediately. Mrs. Maslin has been feeling so well that he is very anxious to try the experiment when she is at her strongest and best. He promises nothing. It may result in her death, but we must try it, Rosanna, if only for Claire's sake."

"Does she — Mrs. Maslin know about it?" asked Rosanna.

"She knows nothing, my dear," said the Colonel sadly. "Just sits and looks into space all day long. And she was the gayest, brightest, happiest creature. They called her the most popular woman in the Army. I can't tell you what she was to us." He bent his fine head and a sigh that was nearly a sob shook his shoulders. "We may lose her," he whispered.

"No, indeed!" said Rosanna. "I know Dr. Branshaw is going to make her perfectly well again. *I* don't feel worried at all. I feel so happy I don't know what to do. So *glad!* Oh, Colonel, just think! Claire will have her mother again. You can't think how a person wants her mother. It doesn't matter how many other people are good to you no one is like a mother. I am sure this is so, because you know *my* mother is dead, and I feel so lonely and empty, even when I have my grandmother

and Cita and Uncle Bob. Somehow nobody's shoulder feels the same as a mother's. My mother died when I was a baby, but I know it, just the same."

Tears started to Colonel Maslin's eyes as he listened to the brave, uncomplaining little girl.

"You are quite right, my dear," he said. "And I pray that your doctor will give Claire's mother back to her. If she is cured, it will be your gift. Not one of the specialists we have had ever discovered the piece of bone pressing on her brain."

"She will be well," declared Rosanna. "I wish the operation was all over with."

She wished it more than ever the next day when they swallowed a heavy apology for a breakfast and drove to the hospital where Mrs. Maslin had been taken. Rosanna will never to the end of her days be able to look at certain magazines without a shudder. The two girls sat or walked restlessly around the bare waiting-room, turned over the pages of the periodicals on the prim table, or gazed silently out of the window where they could see the usually impassive and unmoved Chang pacing restlessly up and down beside the limousine.

Occasionally Colonel Maslin came in, made a brief comment, and dashed out again. Each time he left Claire whispered, "Poor father!" little guessing that her father, rushing back to the operating-room, was whispering to himself, "Poor Claire! My poor baby!"

Somehow or other time dragged on, the anxiety growing with every moment until at last, looking more haggard than ever, Colonel Maslin entered and took his daughter in his arms.

"It is over, darling," he said huskily. "It was very bad. She may not live. You must be brave. She is coming out of the ether, and the doctor wants us to be with her when she becomes conscious. Can you be *quite* calm and natural?"

"You know that I can," said Claire quietly. "Come, dad!"

They left the room and Rosanna, forgotten, clasped her hands passionately. "Oh, *please* save her! *Please* make her well! Claire *needs* her mother," she prayed over and over.

In the silent room upstairs Claire caught a blurred impression of whiteness and watchfulness. Her mother's bloodless hand lay on the counterpane and a doctor watched the fluttering pulse. Another doctor stood ready to administer an injection in case the feeble heart should fail. A couple of nurses moved swiftly but noiselessly here and there. They made way for the man and girl and beckoned them close to the bed. Colonel Maslin dropped on one knee and standing with her arm around his neck, Claire looked at her mother whom she had not seen for so long.

Her head was closely bandaged, but oh, how beautiful and how dear she was! After what seemed an endless time there was a flutter of the white eye-

lids, and they lifted slowly. For a moment the beautiful eyes stared blankly. Hope died in Claire's heart. Then the weary eyes found them, looked at the Colonel, studied Claire in a curious way, and then seemed to embrace them both. A faint smile flickered across the face, and a faint whisper trembled on the air.

"My two sweethearts!" Mrs. Maslin said, and as though even that was too great a tax drifted off into unconsciousness again.

"She is all right," said Doctor Branshaw. "Better go now, Maslin. I will see you downstairs."

Tears were pouring down the Colonel's face as he rose and with a long, adoring look at his wife, left the room, Claire clinging to his hand. But out in the long corridor, the door safely closed behind them, Claire gave a deep sigh and quietly fainted.

The Colonel picked his daughter up, turned into the first unoccupied room and laid her on the bed. Then he hurried after a nurse. When Claire came to herself, Rosanna, rather pale, was holding her hand. She was trying to swallow something bitter, and her father stood near her, looking as though he was to blame.

"Oh, I am *so* sorry, daddy!" she said as soon as she could speak. "I feel all right. What a silly thing for me to do! How is mother?"

"If you are going to behave yourself now, dear, I will go and see," said Colonel Maslin. He kissed

her and hurried off. Claire, feeling strangely weak but so happy, turned to Rosanna.

"She knew us!" she said. "She knew us both, and now, even if she dies, I will always have that to remember."

"She will not die!" Rosanna declared for the hundredth time.

"There are worse cases than your mother's," said the nurse comfortingly. "If she stands the shock, she will be all right, and I am sure she will. Don't you worry or think she is not going to be well. You want to send thoughts of courage and strength to her instead of thinking that she must die."

"That sounds like some of the new religions," said Rosanna.

"It is not," said the nurse. "It is just plain common sense. Just you try it!"

"I don't need to," said Rosanna. "I know Mrs. Maslin will get well, and Claire will know so, too, when she gets over being frightened."

Claire did get over being frightened, although for many days her mother's life hung by a thread. They stayed at the nearest hotel, and as Colonel Maslin had been given leave of absence they had the comfort of his presence.

As time went on and it became a certainty that Mrs. Maslin would live and be her own self again, Claire was allowed to see her mother. At first her visits were limited to a skimpy five minutes once a

day, spent under the eyes of a stern nurse who watched the time and put her out without mercy. But as the days wore by and the invalid grew stronger, Claire was allowed to spend many happy hours with her mother.

Came a day when the Colonel was obliged to return to duty. And after a talk with her mother Claire went with him, Rosanna of course accompanying them. Rosanna had had a good time after the first period of worry, during which she never left Claire for a half hour. And Claire was grateful. Rosanna did not guess how grateful. She did not guess how often Claire talked to her mother and father about the Girl Scout's loyalty and devotion. And Claire was naturally so quiet that it was hard for her to tell Rosanna just what she thought about it all. But Rosanna did not mind. She knew without words what her companionship had meant to Claire during her time of trial.

Rosanna knew from that strange inner source that tells us so much and leads us so unerringly that she had done right to give up the chance to see the Ports of the World. And she was glad. Her sacrifice had proved to her, at least, that being a Girl Scout meant more than the happy companionship along the woodland ways in summer, or the friendly striving for merits in winter.

One little thing worried her: her task was to be finished sooner than she had thought. When Claire's mother came home, Rosanna did not want

to be there. For one thing, she wisely felt that Mrs. Maslin would want Claire all to herself, and she knew that Claire would have no time or thought to give anyone else, even a friend as well loved as Rosanna knew herself to be.

Rosanna did not know where to go. The Hargraves had gone down to the old home in Lexington; Mrs. Culver and Helen were visiting in Akron, Ohio. Rosanna thought harder and harder as the days passed, and the bulletins from the hospital grew better and more encouraging. At last the doctor actually set a date. In three days Claire could have her mother. She was to come home slowly and carefully in the limousine. And there must be weeks and weeks of unbroken rest in her own home, with her devoted husband and loving child and the adoring Chang to anticipate every wish.

Then Rosanna had an inspiration. Her old nurse and maid, Minnie, was married and living with her nice, hard-working young husband in a rose-covered cottage in the Highlands. Rosanna knew that they would both be perfectly delighted to receive her.

She closed the book she was reading and went to the telephone. As she reached it, the bell jingled.

"Hello!" she said listlessly.

A voice vaguely familiar answered, "Is Miss Rosanna Horton there?"

"This is Rosanna," said she.

There was a slight pause, then the voice said in a queer *mincy* way, "Oh, yes, Miss Rosanna Horton. Well, can you tell me, please, where Mr. Robert Horton is?"

"He is in France," said Rosanna.

"Are you *sure?*" said the voice. "I heard that he had returned to this country on business and was here in Louisville. I heard he had come to see a niece of his."

Rosanna had heard enough. She commenced to jump up and down.

"Oh, Uncle Robert, Uncle Bobby, where are you? Oh, hurry, hurry!"

"All right, sweetness," said Uncle Bob in his own voice. "I am right behind the house in the garage. I thought I would let you down easy."

Rosanna did not hear anything after "garage." She dropped the receiver, went through the house like a whirlwind, and was clasped in Uncle Robert's arms, where it must be confessed she shed some real and comforting tears.

Rosanna's sacrifice had not been so very easy, you know.

CHAPTER XV

Uncle Bob had very little to say until Colonel Maslin came in and they gathered around the dinner table. Then, with a smile, he commenced his little story.

"Rosanna has been asking me about a million questions. It would take a week or so, hard labor, to answer them all, and then Colonel Maslin and Claire would want to hear about things, so I will make my little speech now.

"We were all settled for the summer in a beautiful old place in the older part of Paris. Just the sort of a place you would love, Rosanna — high walls, and a park with sheep cropping the grass, and woods, and all that. Deer, too. It's too bad you are not there."

Rosanna flushed. "I don't mind, Uncle Bob," she said, and Claire squeezed her hand.

"Well," continued Uncle Bob, "Culver's invention is a bigger thing than we thought, and we thought it was pretty big. I was being worked to death with meetings and presentations and contracts, and all that. It is the one thing that commercial Europe needs today, and there was more work than I could carry.

"Besides that, there was a lot of blueprints, material and so on that I needed, and I wanted to get a look at Rosanna here. I'll say, sweetness, that your poor old Uncle Bob missed you something scandalous! So as long as I had to come as far as New York I thought I would run along and see you all.

"Culver is going back with me. He is the one man to help out over there, and it is too much for me. Besides," he added abruptly, "I thought if she didn't have any pressing engagement on hand, I would take Rosanna back with me."

"Oh, Uncle Bob!" cried Rosanna. "It is too good to be true! Are you truly in earnest?" It was almost what Rosanna had said months before when Mr. Robert had first announced the trip, and he must have remembered it, because with a smile he answered, "Hope to live and *haf* to die, Rosanna!" and Rosanna seemed satisfied.

"Oh, Rosanna, I am *so* glad!" cried Claire. "You have been so good to me, and now you will still have your good time, only it will be much better because you have been so good to me. I am so glad, and mother will be so glad too when I tell her. Do you know about my mother, Mr. Horton?"

"Your father told me this afternoon. We met downtown, and I congratulate you with all my heart."

"It is all due to Rosanna," said Claire softly.

"Not one of the specialists or doctors discovered anything wrong with her skull, and I was so young when she fell from her horse that I never once connected it with her trouble. I should think you would be the next happiest girl in the world, Rosanna. *I* am the happiest."

"I am very, very happy," confessed Rosanna. "It seems too good to be true that I am to go to France and the other places after all, and it is so good to go and remember what a happy summer you are having with your mother. I wish Helen Culver was here, so I could tell her how fortunate I am."

"You won't see her until you reach New York," said Uncle Bob with a twinkle in his eye, but looking very severely at the end of his cigarette.

"New York!" stammered Rosanna.

"That's right; I forgot to mention that she is going with us."

Rosanna leaned back in her chair and gasped.

"Uh, huh," said Uncle Bob. "Mrs. Culver wants to stay with her sister who is seriously ill, and so poor Helen will have to go with us."

"Oh, my!" gasped Rosanna.

"Everything is settled," said Uncle Bob.

"Oh, my!" said Rosanna again. "When do we go?"

"It will take me about a week to get ready," said Uncle Bob. "As soon as you can get packed, Rosanna, you may come down to the Seelbach with

me. I know Claire will have a lot to do to get ready for her mother. I notice whenever any of our family goes away and gets ready to come back, it is a signal for a mad bout of housecleaning. Everything the poor innocent absentee has or owns is torn up and hung out on the line, and beaten and dusted, and sent to the cleaners. And then all the chairs are set in new places so you don't dare come in in the dark and throw yourself down on your favorite divan, because it isn't there. Perhaps a tea-wagon full of china catches you or a frail, skiddy smoking stand, but the divan is gone."

Everyone laughed.

"You *are* abused," said Rosanna.

"It is true," persisted Uncle Robert. "And when the absent one comes in, everyone stands around waiting to hear him or her say, 'Oh, my, how nice it looks.' Anyway, Rosanna, you come down and join me, and as soon as we hear from Culver, who has already gone to see his family, we will be off for New York. It will be hot traveling."

"I won't mind," said Rosanna, "and you really don't need me any longer, Claire, dear, and I think you ought to have your mother all to yourself."

"She will have to be very quiet for a good while," said Colonel Maslin, "but we won't mind that. Just to see her here or, if she is resting, to know that she is with us, will be happiness enough for us."

"I should think so!" said Rosanna. "Well, Uncle Bobby, I will come down tomorrow, and you can commence by taking me to the movies."

"Hear that?" cried Mr. Horton. "Indeed, your grandmother said, says she, 'Robert,' she says, 'see that Rosanna goes to bed at sharp seven every night. And also,' says she, 'no movies, or ice-cream sodas, or such!'"

"That sounds so like grandmother!" laughed Rosanna. "Well, I will see about things. Oh, Claire, dinner is over, let's go start packing now. I am *so* excited!"

The girls excused themselves and raced upstairs, where Rosanna commenced laying things in neat piles on the divan to be placed in her trunk the first thing in the morning. There was a good deal to do the next day. Cita had sent a list of things she wanted Rosanna to see about, and Mrs. Horton had gone off without her favorite pair of glasses which she thought might be found in one of a number of places she named. So the house had to be opened, and Rosanna found the glasses, not in any of the places mentioned, but on the telephone stand where Mrs. Horton usually lost them. But as Rosanna looked there first, it really didn't matter. She reached the Seelbach just in time to dress for dinner. It was great fun.

Uncle Bob sent up word that he would meet her at half-past six and Rosanna, feeling thrilled and grown up, finished dressing and sat down to wait.

When Mr. Horton came in, he brought a little box with a bunch of sweet peas for Rosanna to wear. He was that kind of a man.

Time did not hang heavily on Rosanna's hands for the next few days. She spent one day with Mabel, and another in Lexington with Elise Hargrave.

Uncle Bob made but one rule, and that was an ironclad one. She must lie down for an hour each day. Uncle Bob did not want to start across the ocean with a worn-out little girl.

Jane and Estella came to see her, and there was talk of a picnic on Bald Mountain, but there was no time to put it through. One afternoon Rosanna gave a tea. It was a Girl Scout tea and was suggested by Uncle Bob, who seemed able to attend to an enormous amount of business and run the affairs of a little girl as well. It was served in the sitting-room that Rosanna and Uncle Bob shared. Elise came up from Lexington, and Rosanna found that about fifteen of their Troop were still in the city. The hotel people set a very pretty table for her, and Uncle Robert came in at noon with a box which he himself carefully opened. Inside were rows of tiny kewpie dolls dressed like little Girl Scouts. Rosanna was delighted.

"They just need one thing," said Uncle Robert, getting out his fountain pen and carefully inking some little dots on their sleeves.

"There!" he exclaimed when the deed was

done. "Any Girl Scouts of *mine* must have Merit badges."

Every one came, and after the first little stiffness it was a great success, especially when Uncle Robert came in bringing Colonel Maslin with him. You wouldn't believe how nice two grown men could be to a lot of Girl Scouts.

Jane was the first to say she must go. "We will see you tomorrow," she said, but Uncle Bob shook his head.

"It is good-bye today," he explained. "I am through with the business that brought me over on this side, and we will take the 8:40 through train tonight for the East, if Rosanna can get ready."

"I can be ready in an hour!" cried Rosanna. "Especially if Claire will stay and help me."

Claire looked at her father. "Of course I will help you, Rosanna dear, but I must go home first. Is the car here, dad?"

"Yes; I thought we could take some of these young ladies home," said the Colonel.

"And I will take the rest," offered Mr. Horton. There was a gust of good-byes and good wishes, and Rosanna was alone. It was almost six o'clock.

Rosanna had kept her trunk nearly packed, and by the time Claire returned the things that had been in her dresser were laid on the bed ready to put in the trays. Claire brought her a gorgeous embroidered kimono, a good-bye present from Mrs.

Maslin. Just the loveliest thing to wear to the dressing-room, thought Rosanna, revelling in its deep color and beautiful handwork. The girls worked swiftly, and before Uncle Bob returned for dinner everything was ready, even to Rosanna's coat and hat and gloves and little change purse. She had put on her plain pongee traveling dress, fine cotton stockings that exactly matched her brown oxfords with their sensible low heels, and looked every inch a well-dressed traveler. Everything was simple and there were no tag ends, ribbons or floating lace collars to get mussed and untidy.

After dinner Uncle Bob excused himself to attend to some last things, and Claire and Rosanna returned to the rooms. There was an empty-looking spot where Rosanna's trunk had stood. Rosanna gave a last look at her things on the bed. Hat, coat, gloves, purse, suitcase; all there.

"Oh, *do* come into the sitting-room!" cried Claire. "Everything is as all right as you can make it. Dad and Mr. Horton will be coming in before you know it, and there is something I want to tell you."

"Something nice?" asked Rosanna, following Claire into the sitting-room, and curling up in the big armchair she had wheeled around to face its mate.

"I hope so," said Claire with a queer little smile.

"Now, Rosanna, I want you to promise on your Scout Honor that you will not interrupt me."

"Word of honor!" promised Rosanna.

"Remember!" warned Claire. "Well, there was once a girl, a Girl Scout, who was very troubled and unhappy. And she had a *perfectly horrid* disposition and every time she went into a tantrum or had the blues she excused herself by thinking that because her dear mother was thought to be insane, she was going to be so too, and she never tried to control herself. She wouldn't make friends, and 'most *hated* other girls because she thought they were so much luckier than she was. Oh, Rosanna, she treated her darling daddy just awfully. She feels so ashamed when she thinks of it."

Rosanna opened her mouth, but Claire laid her hand over it.

"Remember!" she warned. "So she met, through the Girl Scouts, a girl who tried to be her friend. And the bad, sad girl grew to see how much better it was to be gentle and keep her temper under control. Then one day Rosanna — for that was the nice girl's name — discovered the reason why this girl's mother was sick and why her poor head had gone wrong. She found out why Claire's mother could not speak or remember anything and why she sat all day and stared and stared into space, and never knew her little girl any more.

"Well, anyway, now Claire's mother is *well,* all *well,* and just as sweet and bright and loving as ever, and *so* happy! But surely not so happy as Claire is to have her mother back.

"And once, Rosanna, a wise old man who must have looked into the future, gave Claire a gold box to give to the one who should give to Claire a 'gift beyond price.' My mother is that, Rosanna. The Mandarin's box is yours!"

Claire drew a packet from her pocket and laid it in Rosanna's lap. Rosanna clasped her hands over it. "Oh, Claire!" was all she could say at first. Then, "But it was the doctor's operation that cured her; it belongs to him."

Claire shook her red head and smiled. "No, it is yours by rights. All the doctors failed to discover the injury to her head. The box is yours, dear, dear Rosanna! Open it and see what the old Mandarin has hidden there."

Rosanna undid the paper and exclaimed over the wonderful carven casket. But Claire urged her to open the box, and with a nail file Rosanna broke the fine cords that held the seal. She pressed the tiny knob on the front, and the glittering cover sprang open. A little object wrapped in silk lay inside. It proved to be a queer carved figure seated on a sort of stool. It was exquisitely colored and overlaid in parts with gold leaf, and the funny brown face wore a beaming smile. A large cloak of gold

leaf enveloped it, and this had a ruby set in the front like a large clasp.

"I know that figure," said Claire. "It is the god of good luck. I can't remember his name."

"See the way that cunning cloak or robe is fastened with a jewel," said Rosanna, fingering the ruby. There was a little click, and the cloak parted and flew open, disclosing in the unexpected hiding-place another small carved box.

With trembling fingers Rosanna opened it. There, inside, rested the mate to the beautiful jade ring that Claire always wore.

"Oh, how lovely! How perfectly lovely!" cried Rosanna. "Just like yours! Oh, I have always almost envied you that gorgeous ring."

"If it is like mine, there is another surprise in store for you," said Claire, taking the jewel in her hands and pressing on the stone with a swift turning motion. Sure enough the stone raised on tiny hidden springs, and disclosed an opening or socket about the size of a silver three-cent piece.

"What is that for?" asked Rosanna.

"We don't know, but dad thinks these rings are royal, and this place was made for a single dose of poison to be concealed in case the wearer was going to be tortured or something like that. But I don't like to think of anything so horrid. I keep mother's picture in mine." She opened the ring, and showed a tiny colored miniature of her mother.

"It is too perfect!" sighed Rosanna.

"There is one thing I hope you will never forget, Rosanna," said Claire, "and that is why the Mandarin gave you the box. Just to thank you, you know, because you have given me a gift beyond price. This is what has come of your sacrifice. I wish I could tell the old Mandarin about it."

"I will if I see him," laughed Rosanna.

Just as the train started off with Uncle Bob and Rosanna, Claire threw her arms around Rosanna's neck and whispered, "Oh, Rosanna, you *do* know that I love you, and thank you with every breath, don't you?"

"You thank me too much, dear Claire," said Rosanna, "and I love you too."

The whistle blew, the conductor waved his arms and called, "All aboard!" Rosanna threw kisses after Colonel Maslin and Claire as they fell behind. They rolled slowly out of the city. Night fell. The white-jacketed porter went up and down the aisle looking his charges over. He pounced on Rosanna's hat and put it in a paper bag. Rosanna scarcely noticed. Nothing about her seemed real. The jarring train, the lights, the people, all seemed like a dream. Yet it was real, and she, Rosanna, was moving eastward, ever eastward to her grandmother, to Cita, to dear Helen, and the Ports of the World!

THE END